The Effects of High Imprisonment Rates on Communities
Author(s): Todd R. Clear
Reviewed work(s):
Source: *Crime and Justice*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2008), pp. 97-132
Published by: The University of Chicago Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/522360

Todd R. Clear

The Effects of High Imprisonment Rates on Communities

ABSTRACT

When large numbers of parent-aged adults, especially men, cycle through stays in prison and jail at very high rates, communities are negatively affected in myriad ways, including damage to social networks, social relationships, and long-term life chances. These effects impair children, family functioning, mental and physical health, labor markets, and economic and political infrastructures. There are considerable methodological challenges in trying to link the consequences of concentrated incarceration to reduced public safety. Findings from studies are mixed. Yet, as empirical evidence grows of the negative collateral consequences of concentrated incarceration, the likelihood that concentrated incarceration is criminogenic in its effects on those communities becomes stronger. No well-established or proven strategy exists for combating the effects of concentrated incarceration on communities. Most current debates about penal policy are essentially oblivious to the problem. Solutions must flow from changes in the nation's penal philosophy and its sentencing laws.

At no other time or place in world history has there been as long and as large a sustained growth of incarceration as a social policy as has happened in the United States between 1972 and the present. What we do today is often described as "mass incarceration." From 200,000 prisoners in 1972, the prison population has increased to over 1.5 million (over 2.3 million behind bars when jail populations are included). This has been produced not by higher crime rates but by increased rates of sentencing to prison and increased lengths of stay (Raphael and Stoll 2007). This has been especially true with regard to the en-

Todd R. Clear is professor of criminal justice, John Jay College, City University of New York.

0192-3234/2008/0037-0004$10.00

forcement of drug laws, which provide a nearly elastic supply of potential arrests and prison sentences (Fagan 2004).

There are strong indications that such growth will continue for another decade, whatever happens to crime rates (Austin, Naro, and Fabelo 2007). During a period when prisons grew each year without stopping, no other social fact matched the same pattern, not crime, the economy, wartime, age cohorts, or anything else we are accustomed to thinking about as an aspect of crime. What has been the consequence of this unprecedented, generation-long commitment to prison growth?

In this essay, I consider the effects of the growing number of people who go to prison on the communities these prisoners come from. This is not the usual way we consider the impact of incarceration. Usually we think of incarceration as an intervention into the life of a person who has been convicted of a crime. We ask such questions as the following: Was the person deterred from further crime? Were programs provided that ameliorate the troubles that led to the criminal involvement in the first place, problems such as wrongful thinking or inadequate education and skills? Did imprisonment embitter an already ambivalent attitude toward society and its rules, provoking worse adjustment after release?

What we know about the way that prison affects those who go there is, surprisingly, much less than we ought to know. (For a review on this matter, see Gendreau and Cullen [1999] and Smith, Goggin, and Gendreau [2002].) More than 600,000 people are sent to prison in the United States each year; worldwide the figure is a few times that number. With numbers so large, we can assume that people's responses to being imprisoned run the gamut of human experience. As a group, some will appear to have been "turned around," and others—perhaps the larger proportion—will have been cast deeper into the life of crime. If prison is meant to convey a message to those who go there, a few get it; many do not. About one-third of those who go to prison once come back again; of those who go to prison a second time, four-fifths will return repeatedly (Hughes, Wilson, and Beck 2001). Regarding imprisonment as an educational device, we can offer two conclusions. First, its lessons for individuals range widely, from reformative to the exact opposite. Second, as a device to promote law-abiding behavior by those who go there, the results are dim.

The individual-level effects of incarceration on those who go to prison ripple outward. Imprisonment is also an intervention into the lives of people who may never go there themselves. There are three levels of such effects. Imprisonment affects the children of people who are locked up and their families; it affects community infrastructure—the relations among people in communities and the capacity of a community to be a good place to live, work, and raise children—and it affects how safe a community is to live in. One essay in the current volume reviews the way incarcerating people affects their loved ones, especially their children (Murray and Farrington, in this volume). The purpose of my essay is to explore what we know about the unintended consequences of imprisonment for communities, especially community quality of life, but also public safety.

The most commonly expected community-level consequence of incarceration is crime control through deterrence and incapacitation. There is a substantial body of literature on this topic, including three recent review essays (Spelman 2000*a*, 2000*b*; Stemen 2007). Estimates of the crime-prevention effects of incarceration vary, from very sizable impacts on the order of a 9 percent drop in crime for every 10 percent increase in the rate of incarceration (see, e.g., Marvell and Moody 1997) to much smaller ones on the order of a 0.05 percent crime drop for that same level of increase (see also Western 2006) to none at all (Kovandzic and Vieraitis 2006). Three main conclusions can be drawn from this literature.

First, the range of estimates does not tend to converge on a single reliable statistic (compare Western [2006] to Spelman [2000*b*]). Second, a host of impediments, both of method and of logic, confront any attempt to estimate the true crime-prevention effects of incarceration, and even seemingly strong designs are subject to fundamental concerns (see Webster, Doob, and Zimring's [2006] critique of Kessler and Levitt [1999]). Third, more recent studies using more complete data sets and more reliable methods tend to produce smaller overall estimates of the crime-reduction effects of prison growth (Sweeten and Apel, forthcoming). At least one study suggests why, concluding that the past decade's massive growth in imprisonment has diluted the ability to prevent crime through incapacitation (Liedka, Piehl, and Useem 2006).

There are good reasons to doubt the size of the crime-prevention impact of imprisonment. These stem from the massive natural experiment in imprisonment for crime control now under way in the United States. Prison populations have grown every year since 1973—we have a generation of increasing imprisonment. The external validity challenge to a strong prison-reduces-crime argument is illustrated in figure 1, which shows the pattern of crime rates and the prison population between 1931 and 2005. Crime rates started growing in the 1960s and roughly doubled from 1960 to 1970, a period when prison populations were in slight decline (going from a rate of about 120 per 100,000 in 1960 to about 100 per 100,000 in 1970). Since 1973, imprisonment rates have grown monotonically upward. Crime rates have been anything but monotonic. They more than doubled in the 1970s, peaking in 1981, and then dropped nearly one-sixth until the mid-1980s. They rose again to a peak in the early 1990s, declining almost one-third from that peak. Incarceration rates grew steeply in the 1980s and began to decelerate in the late 1990s, growing much more slowly since about 2000. Today, the crime rate is about what it was in 1970, when the prison expansion started. So whatever the true impact of imprisonment is, it cannot be simply linear and additive for the last 30 years.

There are easy explanations for the disconnect between incarceration growth and crime rates, though (again) we cannot say precisely how they work. We know that some crime is replaced. That is, when a person is locked up for a given crime, he is incapacitated from committing more crime during his prison stay, but others replace him and commit at least some of those crimes anyway. This is most obviously true for drug sales, which continue with little interruption. It appears also to be true for much of the crime committed by young men in groups, including predatory street crime (Felson 2003). Locking up some who are actively criminal may destabilize criminal networks in ways that provoke more violence rather than less (Blumstein and Beck 1999). The larger number of people cycling through the prison system may itself be a problem if going to prison increases the chances of criminal behavior, as some have suggested (see Gendreau and Cullen 1999).

In general, then, the crime-reduction effects of imprisonment are unlikely to be very large. What about the other effects of incarceration on communities?

This essay examines studies of the effects of incarceration on communities where it occurs at high levels of concentration. Here is what the literature shows.

Incarceration is concentrated in communities of disadvantage, especially communities of color. Because residential housing is segregated and incarceration is concentrated among poor black men, incarceration is

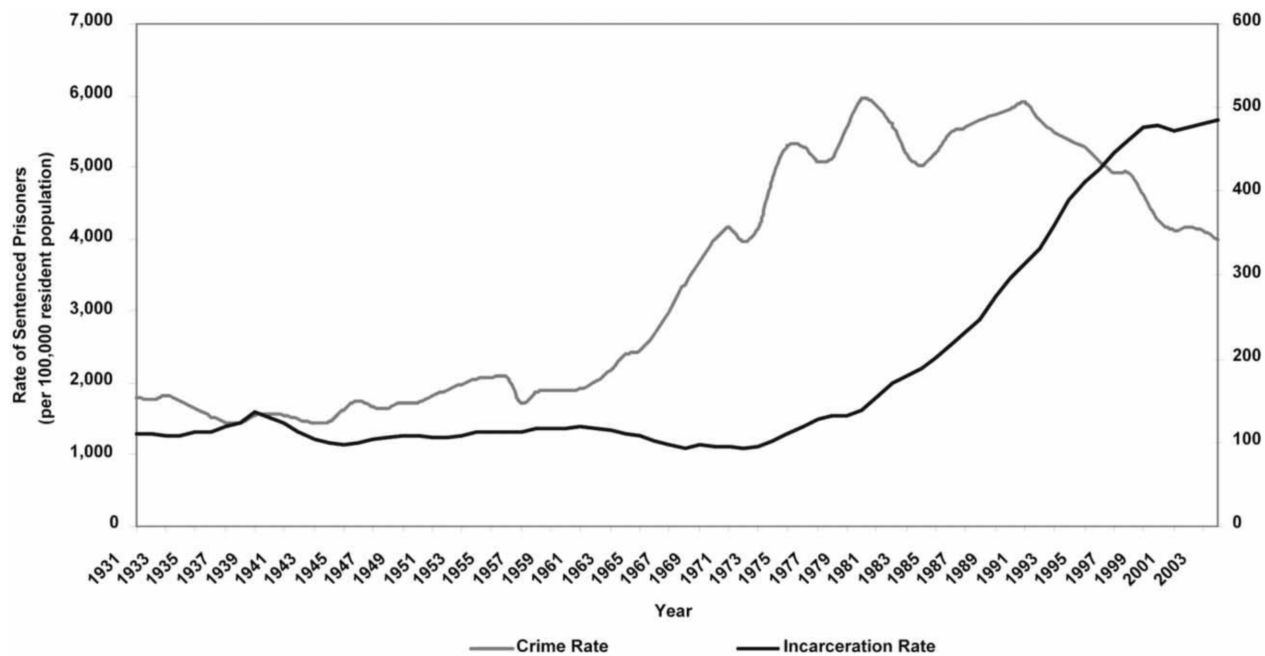

FIG. 1.—Improvement rate per 100,000 population, sentenced state and federal prisoners, and crime rate per 100,000 population, 1931–2005. Source: Austin et al. 2007.

a particularly dominant characteristic of a small number of urban, impoverished neighborhoods. In those places, parent-aged adults, especially men, cycle through stays in prison and jail at astounding rates.

Those communities are negatively affected by this concentration of incarceration in myriad ways. Penal system cycling for young adults affects social networks, social relationships, and long-term life prospects; subsequently, communities where incarceration is concentrated suffer damage at the hands of the penal system. These destructive effects are felt in the lives of children, as well as in family functioning, mental and physical health, labor markets, and the economic and political infrastructures of these places.

The negative effects of high rates of concentrated incarceration probably decrease public safety. There are considerable methodological challenges in trying to link the consequences of concentrated incarceration to reduced public safety, and the findings from current studies are mixed. Yet, as empirical evidence of the negative collateral consequences of incarceration grows, the case that concentrated incarceration has become criminogenic in its effects on involved communities has become stronger.

No well-established or proven strategy exists for combating the effects of concentrated incarceration on communities. Most current debates about penal policy are oblivious to the problem of concentrated incarceration. Any solutions to this problem must flow from changes in penal philosophy and in sentencing laws.

This essay has three sections. Section I describes the nature of concentrated incarceration and shows how it might affect communities through its effects on social networks and informal social control. Section II summarizes studies of the effects of incarceration on children, families, and the fabric of community life. It closes by considering the ways in which incarceration may affect public safety in communities; this includes a discussion of the methodological considerations in modeling these effects. Section III proposes policy and research agendas suggested by these results.

I. The Concentration of Incarceration in Communities

Incarceration is not an equal opportunity activity. It concentrates in four important ways. Men are almost 15 times more likely to end up in prison than are women, blacks are almost seven times more likely to go there than are whites, and people who fail to finish high school are three times more likely to spend time behind prison bars than are high school graduates. Prison is also for younger adults: 69 percent of the confined are under age 40. These differential odds of incarceration are additive. Western has estimated that almost six in 10 black males who do not finish high school go to prison during their lifetimes. (For all of the above, see Harrison and Beck [2006] and Western [2006, p. 27].)

These four layers of concentration—race, age, gender, and human capital—come together to produce the fifth and crucial sphere of concentrated incarceration: place. The extreme racial and socioeconomic segregation of housing in the United States means that the odds of incarceration add up in some places to reach stunning levels. Lynch and Sabol (2004*a*) estimated that, in some of the poorest neighborhoods in Cleveland and Baltimore, almost one out of every five males aged 18–44 was behind bars on any given day. It is important to know that this daily count of neighborhood residents behind bars masks a more substantial flow in and out. One-fifth may be locked up on any given day, but from one day to the next, as different men go in and out of the prison, a different set of men get their turn behind bars. In some areas of Brooklyn, one of every three youth aged 16–24 living in the neighborhood is removed and sent to prison or jail each year (Cadora 2007). For many who are removed, the stay is brief, but added up across numerous years, incarceration in these neighborhoods is nearly ubiquitous. Figure 2 is a map of the neighborhood incarceration rates of Brooklyn, showing how incarceration concentrates in a handful of neighborhoods.

When Dina Rose and I interviewed about 125 people in two very poor neighborhoods in Tallahassee, we learned that every family in our sample was touched by prison—all reported a family member in prison within the past 5 years, and whatever the effects of incarceration are on those imprisoned, effects were felt by everyone in our sample. If nearly every family in a high-incarceration neighborhood is touched by imprisonment, what fingerprints, exactly, does that touch leave behind?

Three recent ethnographies give us a picture of these dynamics. Donald Braman (2004) spent 2 years studying families from poor, high-incarceration areas of Washington, DC. He provides detailed descriptions of how incarceration affected 12 families. From their stories, he

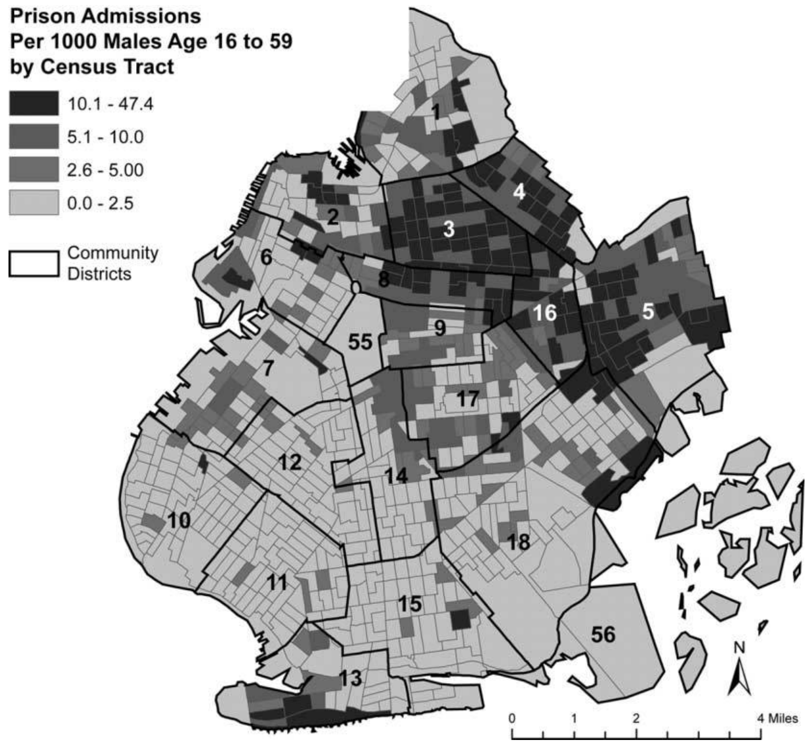

FIG. 2.—Prison admissions per 1,000 males aged 16–59 by census tract. Map provided by Charles Swartz, Justice Mapping, Inc., New York, June 12, 2007.

documents how incarceration breaks families apart, strains their economic resources, weakens parental involvement with children, and leads to emotional and social isolation. He shows the ways that having a male family member go to prison interferes with employment prospects for those who remain behind, and he concludes that, on balance, the consequences of incarceration borne by families are a net negative.

Adrian Nicole LeBlanc (2004), a journalist, spent 10 years documenting the lives of women in an extended Latina family in the South Bronx region of New York City. She showed how cycles of stays in both prison and jail become crucial events in the lives of young mothers as they struggle with the ways in which incarceration affects relationships, especially those with children. Her descriptions of how criminal justice and welfare interact to dominate the lives of these young mothers show how incarceration becomes a thread in the fabric of community life there.

Johnna Christian (2004) studied some families living in the Queens borough of New York who had men in upstate prisons. She traveled with the families as they made the daylong trek from Columbus Circle in New York City to upstate prisons, visiting loved ones. She documented the fiscal and emotional costs these families bear to maintain ties to their family members in prison, and she describes the influence of incarceration as a force in one Queens neighborhood.

The perspectives taken in each of these studies are a bit different, but what they report is broadly consistent. The effects of family members' incarceration are not straightforward. Most of the men who ended up behind bars engaged in behavior that created strains on the family. When they were arrested and ended up cycling through prison or jail, some of that strain was lessened. But, at the same time, a new set of strains came along. Families struggled financially to deal with court costs and later the need to provide support for people who were locked up. Parenting with someone behind bars is an emotional and practical strain. A host of destabilizing consequences—housing changes, school maladaptations, welfare problems, and strains on relationships—follow the person's trip to the prison. Each researcher concludes that incarceration effects are a net negative for the families they studied. As Braman puts it, "Incarceration forcibly restructures household composition and kin relations" (2004, p. 10).

There are sound theoretical reasons to expect the ripple effects of high levels of incarceration to be both substantial and problematic (Rose and Clear 1998). We know that social networks are the building blocks of human and social capital. That is, the relationships people develop and maintain define the limits of the support they may engender to help them accomplish their aims and deal with life problems as they arise. Incarceration affects social networks by removing one of the members of a poor family's network. About three-quarters of minority men who go to prison are fathers (Western 2006, p. 137). But almost always the person is also a child and a sibling of others.

The work done by social networks is crucial to quality of life, forming the basis for social support, providing access to goods and services, and structuring the limits of a person's lifelong long-term opportunities and short-term problem solving. So-called "strong" ties, those that are reciprocated in ways that do not create relationships outside the network, are good for intimate support but not for building social capital. "Weak" ties, those that create bridges to other networks, are useful for expanding one's horizons and may offer access to assistance from people who are not in one's network but who are connected through that (weak) bond (for a classic discussion on this matter, see Granovetter [1993]). Studies of social networks in impoverished places find that these are dominated by strong ties (Dominguez and Watkins 2003) and that a substantial portion of ties that provide social support are ties to government services (Bursik and Grasmick 1993).

When a loved one goes to prison, a strong tie is threatened for the person who remains behind. That person can either invest personal capital in maintaining that tie or learn how to live without it. People use both strategies. When the tie is broken, there is a need to replace it with another intimate tie. A replacement loved one is needed. In poor places where many men either are locked up or are poor prospects for relationships because of their criminal histories, women looking for "good" male partners are at a distinct numerical disadvantage. (I return to this issue in the next section.) For those who try to sustain the tie, there are considerable costs in time, money, and emotional investment. But, in general, in places where strong ties dominate social networks and government social services are the main source of social support, removing a strong tie has little impact on the size or shape of a social network (Rengifo and Waring 2005).

Yet, there are opportunity costs borne by social networks in places with high incarceration rates. The ordinary role played by young men in social networks is "entrepreneurial." They are supposed to be entering the labor market meeting new people (and bringing back those weak ties to their own networks), thereby expanding the productive capacity of all the networks of which they are a part. Young men bridge their personal networks to those of others, thereby expanding access to social capital for all their ties. Men in prison cannot perform that function in the free world; they can only link their networks to the prison world.

Social networks are also the foundation for informal social control. Hunter (1985) identified two types of informal social control: parochial and private. Both are a product of social networks. Parochial controls are provided by contacts with neighbors and other local adults whose living circumstances put them in a child's life. Private controls are provided by intimates, especially family members. The capacity of these informal social controls is an aspect of the size and nature of social networks that place parochial and private ties in the youth's life.

Social networks are not necessarily always insulators against crime. In poor neighborhoods, social ties may promote social capital in ways that increase criminal activity (Browning, Feinberg, and Dietz 2004). People who are actively engaged in crime use their exchange relations to promote their criminal activity just as they do other activities. So while social networks are the building blocks of informal social control, they can also strengthen the capacity for crime. Imprisonment does not alter by much the social networks of a person's nonincarcerated strong ties, and to the degree that incarceration increases that person's ties to others who are criminally active, it may promote greater crime as well (Rengifo 2007).

Social control theories also emphasize the normative aspect of community safety. Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls (1997, p. 918) proposed that communities are made safe when people share a normative expectation that these researchers call "collective efficacy," or the degree of "social cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good." Bursik and Grasmick (1993) developed an extension of social disorganization theory in which they showed how community-level processes can bolster informal social control and thereby reduce crime. In both instances, incarceration can play a role, because, when intimates are removed to prison, people often respond by isolating themselves in ways that undermine norms of cooperation and mutual support. Similarly, Tyler and his colleagues (e.g., Tyler and Fagan 2005) have developed a series of arguments regarding the role of "legitimacy" in reducing crime. When the law is seen as fair, they find, there is a greater tendency to comply with it. So in communities where many people are removed for incarceration, to the degree that these removals are seen as unfair, the rule of law is weakened.

Thus, there are several theoretical mechanisms through which incarceration might affect communities, especially community safety. To these community-level normative perspectives can be added the raw effects of mathematics: having a large number of people who have been to prison as residents bodes poorly for a community's general level of crime. For example, if going to prison reduces a person's ability to get and to keep a job, even by a small factor, then neighborhoods where many people have been to prison are also neighborhoods where those

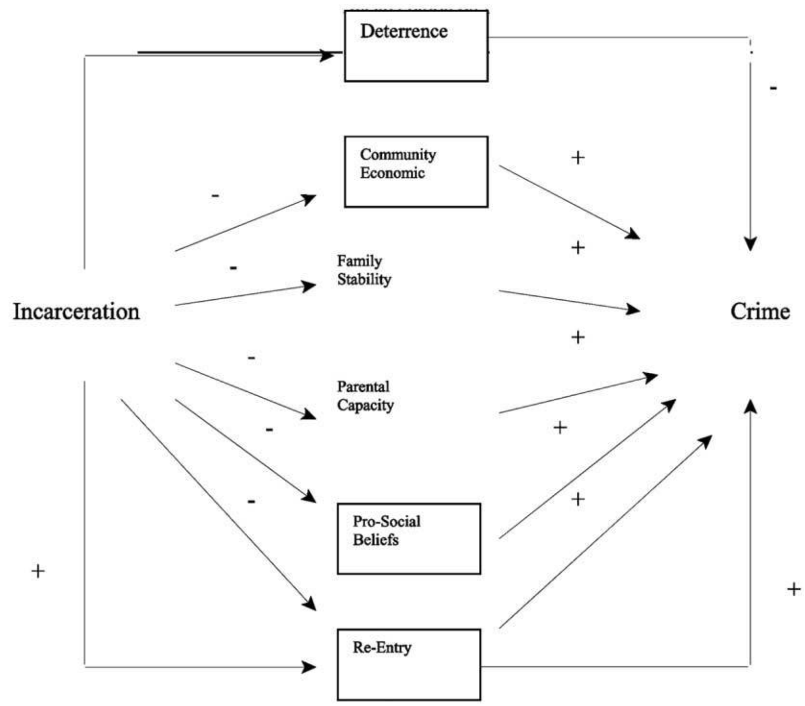

FIG. 3.—Model of interactions between crime, incarceration, and individual, familial, and environmental factors. Source: Clear (2007).

people have trouble in the job market. The implications include higher unemployment and lower incomes.

There are substantial problems in modeling the community-level effects of incarceration. These are illustrated by the relationship between incarceration and crime, shown as a simple conceptual model in figure 3 (Clear 2007, p. 150). The figure shows that incarceration tends to reduce crime through incapacitation and deterrence but that it also tends to increase crime through destabilization of families and by undermining other sources of informal social control. Thus, incarceration both increases and decreases crime. This figure oversimplifies that pattern, because crime also has effects on families, the economy, and other sources of informal social control. There are also likely to be interactions among these forces that are not included in the conceptual model.

This bidirectional causation and mutual causality make it exceedingly difficult to sort out exactly what causes what and by how much. Some researchers attempt to model directly the effects of incarceration on some aspect of interpersonal or community dynamic. Others seek to infer effects on communities by adding up effects on individuals, such as is done in studies of labor market participation after incarceration and studies of legal legitimacy.

In each of these cases, questions persist about the reliability of precise estimates. Causal bidirectionality creates modeling challenges. That so many network- and community-level forces exert pressure in multiple directions, both receiving the effects of incarceration and producing changes in rates of incarceration, means that there is a spatial overdetermination of effects. The kinds of data now available do not allow modeling of all the recursive paths over time, with all the necessary controls and interactions, in order to sustain an unassailable claim that incarceration has this specific weight in producing this specific outcome. Yet, as we travel through the host of studies bearing on the ways in which incarceration effects are felt through the range of human patterns in families, communities, and the polity, at some point the limitations of design begin to become less important than the sheer logical power of consistently problematic outcomes realized in domain after domain. What emerges is a tightly coupled system of effects, many small; but when these are aggregated, they make up an overwhelming dynamic of which incarceration is a significant part. In the search for a more finely tuned understanding of exactly what causes what and by how much, it is important not to lose sight of the bigger picture. When communities suffer these ill effects, children are more likely to become delinquent (Rucker 2007) and incarceration, at high levels, can become a self-sustaining system. In another context, I referred to this system of effects as "death by a thousand little cuts" (Clear 2007, p. 93).

II. The Effects of Incarceration on Communities

Two general kinds of studies examine the effects of incarceration on communities. Some studies attempt to establish ways in which incarceration directly causes some sort of community-level outcome. Studies of public health, labor market participation, and children are often of this type. Other studies examine how incarceration contributes logically to community-level problems, for example, institutional infrastructure. It is not crucial to bear this distinction in mind, because of the way incarceration is embedded in a system of mutual effects. However, the limits in methodologies are sometimes important, particularly when the outcome of interest is public safety.

A. Children and Families

The family is the basic building block of informal social control. Families are the main institution by which children are socialized, and the family is the core source of social support upon which people feel free to draw. Yet families are changing in America, especially poor families. Some changes for American poor people have been devastating: divorce rates are one-third higher and births to unmarried mothers have doubled, as has the rate of households headed by single mothers (see Western, Lopoo, and McLanahan 2004). Incarceration is a key ingredient in these changes, affecting, as it does, children, marriage, parenting, and interpersonal relationships.

1. *Children.* Estimates of the number of children with a parent in prison run as high as 2.3 million, or almost 3 percent of the underage-18 population (Martone 2005). Rucker (2007) has estimated that 20 percent of black children had a father with an incarceration history, with 33 percent of black children whose fathers who did not graduate from high school having one. These children are affected by having a parent behind bars, both directly and indirectly through the ways incarceration affects their life chances.

Several recent studies examine how incarceration affects children (for a review, see Murray [2005]). A recent systematic review of controlled studies of how incarceration affects children (Murray and Farrington, in this volume) finds strong evidence that incarceration exacerbates certain problems of growing up. They describe a dozen studies showing that parental incarceration is a risk factor for later delinquency and conclude that having a parent incarcerated makes the child three to four times more likely to develop a record for juvenile delinquency. The five studies they review about mental health suggest that having an incarcerated parent makes a child two and a half times more likely to develop a serious mental disorder. Studies also suggest a link between parental incarceration and school failure, underemployment, and illegal drug use.

These studies do not necessarily demonstrate that incarceration causes these problematic child outcomes. Indeed, the evidence that

Murray and Farrington provide from controlled experiments on this issue is mixed, with some studies indicating that preexisting risks may account for at least some of the consequences of parental incarceration. Nonetheless, there is no question that children whose parents go to prison have, on average, worse life outcomes in a variety of ways, ranging from mental health and social functioning to deviant behavior and crime.

2. *Families and Marriage.* Incarceration policy has been a contributor to the deterioration of poor American families. As many as 700,000 families have a loved one behind bars on any given day (Lynch and Sabol 2004*b*, p. 283). Almost three of five African American high school dropouts will spend some time in prison (Pettit and Western 2004), and two-fifths are fathers who were living with their children before they entered prison (Western, Pattillo, and Weiman 2004). One-fourth of juveniles convicted of crime have children (Nurse 2004). Phillips et al. (2006, p. 103) point out that "there is evidence . . . that the arrest of parents disrupts marital relationships, separates children and parents, and may contribute to the permanent legal dissolution of these relationships. It may also contribute to the establishment of grandparent-headed households and, upon parents' return home from prison, to three-generation households."

Poor neighborhoods in which there is a large ratio of adult women to men are places where female-headed, single-parent families are common. Incarceration is one of several dynamics that remove black males from their neighborhoods, producing this ratio (Darity and Myers 1994). In a county-level analysis for 1980 and 1990, Sabol and Lynch (2003) found that removals to and returns from prison increased the rate of female-headed households in the county. Analyzing the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Harvard economist Adam Thomas (2005) found that going to prison substantially reduces the likelihood of being married. The effects hold across all racial and ethnic groups, but they are strongest for black males over 23 years old, whose likelihood of getting married drops by 50 percent following incarceration. Previously incarcerated men who do become involved with women are more likely to cohabit without marriage. Western's (2006) analysis estimates that going to prison cuts the rate of marriage within a year of the birth of a child by at least one-half and about doubles the chance of separating in that same year (Thomas 2005, figs. 6.8, 6.9). It is not surprising that Lynch and Sabol (2004*b*, p. 283) estimate that 66 percent of the ever-married prison population are currently divorced, compared to a rate of 17 percent for nonimprisoned adults. Phillips et al.'s (2006) longitudinal study of poor, rural children in North Carolina found that having a parent get arrested leads to family breakup and family economic strain, both of which are risk factors for later delinquency.

3. *Parenting.* While they are locked up, many men maintain contact with their children; about half receive mail, phone calls, or both, and one-fifth receive visits (Mumola 2000, cited in Western, Pattillo, and Weiman 2004, table 1.5). But the rate at which mothers dissolve their relationships with their children's father during the latter's imprisonment is very high, even for fathers who were active in their children's lives prior to being arrested—only 20–25 percent of prisoners are visited in prison by their children (Western, Pattillo, and Weiman 2004, pp. 10–11). Nonetheless, some fathers who have had little contact with their children before imprisonment renew those bonds during incarceration. Edin, Nelson, and Paranal (2004, p. 57) show that "incarceration often means that fathers miss out on . . . key events that serve to build parental bonds and to signal . . . that they intend to support their children both financially and emotionally. . . . The father's absence at these crucial moments . . . can weaken his commitment to the child years later, and the child's own commitment to his or her father."

4. *Family Functioning.* Lynch and Sabol (2004*b*) have estimated that between one-fourth and one-half of all prisoners disrupt a family when they are removed for incarceration. Murray (2005) lists a dozen studies of ways that the incarceration of a male parent or spouse (or partner) affects the functioning of the family unit left behind. The most prominent effect is economic—spouses and partners report various forms of financial hardship, sometimes extreme, that result from the loss of income after the male partner's incarceration. This "loss of income is compounded by additional expenses of prison visits, mail, telephone calls . . . and sending money to [the person] imprisoned" (Murray 2005, p. 445). Because most families of prisoners start with limited financial prospects, even a small financial detriment can be devastating.

After the male's imprisonment, the family responds in a variety of ways. Families often move, leading to disruptions that may include the arrival of replacement males in the family and reduced time for maternal parenting owing to secondary employment (Edin, Nelson, and

Paranal 2004). Moves may also result in more crowded living conditions (especially when the prisoner's family moves in with relatives) and changes in educational districts, which may produce disruptions in schooling.

There are also relationship problems. Female partners who find a male replacement for the man who has gone to prison often face the psychological strains that accompany the arrival of a new male in the household. Prisoners' spouses and partners report strains in relationships with other family members and neighbors. Carlson and Cervera (1992) showed that women often have to rely on family and friends to fill the hole left by the incarcerated husband, providing money, companionship, and babysitting, and generally straining those ties. Strains in relationships with children are also reported, resulting from emotional and functional difficulties that spouses and partners encounter when a male partner goes to prison (Nurse 2004).

5. *Intimate (Sexual) Relations.* The incarceration of large numbers of parent-aged males restricts the number of male partners available in the neighborhood. This means that mothers find more competition for intimate partners who can serve as parents for their children. In the context of more competition for male support, mothers may feel reluctant to end relationships that are unsuitable for children. Likewise, men living with advantageous gender ratios may feel less incentive to remain committed in their parenting partnerships.

Citing these dynamics, epidemiologists James Thomas and Elizabeth Torrone (2006) investigated the role of high rates of incarceration on sexual behavior in poor neighborhoods. Analyzing North Carolina counties and communities, they found that incarceration rates in one year predicted later increases in rates of gonorrhea, syphilis, and chlamydia among women. They also found that a doubling of incarceration rates increased the incidence of childbirth by teenage women by 71.61 births per 100,000 teenage women. They conclude that "high rates of incarceration can have the unintended consequence of destabilizing communities and contributing to adverse health outcomes" (Thomas and Torrone 2006, p. 1). This latter finding is notable because, for mothers, teenage births are more likely to lead to lower wages, underemployment, reliance upon welfare, and single parenthood; for children of mothers who have their first child at a very early age, there is an increased likelihood of arrest for delinquency and violent crime (Pogarsky, Lizotte, and Thornberry 2003).

Incarceration, which distorts local sex ratios, also seems to explain at least part of the higher rate of HIV among African American men and women. Johnson and Raphael (2005, p. 3) analyzed data on AIDS infection rates provided by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from 1982 to 2001 and found "very strong effects of male incarceration rates on both male and female AIDS infection rates [and] . . . the higher incarceration rates among black males over this period explain a large share of the racial disparity in AIDS between black women and women of other racial and ethnic groups."

B. Community Institutions and Infrastructure

Impoverished places are poor because people there do not make much money, from work or otherwise. They are also places, disconnected from mainstream political life, where negative attitudes toward formal social institutions are common. Incarceration exacerbates these problems.

1. *The Economics of Community Life.* People who get into trouble with the law are characterized by poor work records before they get arrested. Only 42 percent of mothers and 55 percent of fathers who are incarcerated were working full time at the time of their arrest; 32 percent of mothers and 18 percent of fathers were unemployed and not even looking for work (Uggen, Wakefield, and Western 2005).

Going to prison further deteriorates these already weak employment prospects. While during their initial period of release from incarceration both men and women are slightly more likely to be employed than before imprisonment, these short-term effects rapidly wear off as their participation in the labor market diminishes over time (see LaLonde and George [2003]; Cho and LaLonde [2005] for women; Western, Kling, and Weiman [2001] for men). Jeffrey Grogger (1995) demonstrates that merely being arrested has a short-term negative impact on earnings, while Richard Freeman (1992) shows that suffering a conviction and imprisonment has a permanent impact on earning potential. Jeffrey Kling (1999) finds small effects on the earnings of people convicted of federal crimes, mostly concentrated among those convicted of white-collar crimes. Western (2006, fig. 5.1) estimates that going to prison reduces annual earnings by about one-third among people sent to state prison, and he argues that "incarceration carries not just an economic penalty on the labor market; it also confines ex-prisoners to bad jobs that are characterized by high turnover and little chance of moving up the ladder" (p. 128).

Not only does this mean that these neighborhoods have large concentrations of residents who are less engaged in the job market and earn diminished income, but men who are "stuck in low-wage or unstable jobs [find] that their opportunities for marriage will be limited . . . [and] the stigma of incarceration makes single mothers reluctant to marry or live with the fathers of their children" (Uggen, Wakefield, and Western 2005, p. 221), with the result that both work and marriage prospects are degraded (Huebner 2005).

2. *The Production of Local Labor Markets.* The economic prospects of people who live in poor communities are linked. Family members earning money contribute to the welfare of their families, and this is true even when some of those earnings are from criminal activity such as drug sales. Edin and Lein's (1997) study of poor mothers found that up to 91 percent of them reported that they had received money from members in their networks; 55 percent had received cash from their families, 32 percent from their boyfriends, and 41 percent from their child's father. Incarceration removes from the neighborhood many of the men who had provided support to these women. The concentration of formerly incarcerated men in poor neighborhoods may also damage the labor market prospects of others in the community. Roberts (2004, p. 1294) points out that "the spatial concentration of incarceration . . . impedes access to jobs for youth in those communities because it decreases the pool of men who can serve as their mentors and their links to the working world . . . generating employment discrimination against entire neighborhoods." Sabol and Lynch (2003) have shown that, as county-level incarceration rates grow, so do unemployment rates for blacks who live in those counties.

Ethnographies (Sullivan 1989; Venkatesh 1997, 2006) show how, in impoverished neighborhoods, a work-aged male generates economic activity that translates into purchases at the local deli, child support, and similar expenditures. This economic value is generated in a variety of endeavors, including off-the-books work, intermittent illicit drug trade, theft, welfare, and part-time employment. Many, if not most, of those who engage in crime also have legal employment, so their removal from the neighborhood removes a worker from the local legal economy (Fagan and Freeman 1999). In large numbers, incarceration raids supplies of local human capital and leaves a gap in employable residents. Even families that reap the individual benefit of newly available employment suffer the indirect costs of depleted neighborhood economic strength. One estimate (Holzer 2007) holds that increases in incarceration since 1980 have reduced young black male labor force activity by 3–5 percent.

3. *Attitudes toward Authority and the State.* Peter St. Jean (2006) has gathered extensive crime and community data on the neighborhoods of Buffalo (New York), including interviews of "old heads" in poor, primarily black areas. He concludes that "preexisting socio-economic and other conditions [combine with] law enforcement factors—profiling, discrimination, different responses to crime committed by blacks and Hispanics as opposed to whites—to produce a pervasive sense of cynicism" (p. 7). Crutchfield (2005) investigated the effects of concentrated levels of young men in reentry on the attitudes of neighbors who had not been to prison. He found that in "neighborhoods with relatively large concentrations of former prisoners and, by extension . . . communities with more churning of people into and out of the prison system . . . [the negative attitude] in those places that we ordinarily attribute to economic disadvantage is due in part to sentencing patterns and correctional policies" (p. 2). Tyler and Fagan (2005) show that people in New York City neighborhoods where incarceration rates are highest tend to view the police as unfair and disrespectful: this corrodes their views of the legitimacy of policing and broader governmental authority and, in turn, signals their withdrawal from social regulation and political life.

4. *Voting.* More than 5.3 million people in the United States are estimated to have been prohibited from voting as a consequence of their criminal records (Uggen and Manza 2006). These disenfranchised Americans tend to concentrate in poor neighborhoods, so that mass incarceration "translates the denial of individual felons' voting rights into disenfranchisement of entire communities" (Roberts 2004, p. 1292). A study of voter disenfranchisement patterns in Atlanta (King and Mauer 2004, p. 15) found that predominantly black areas have a voter disenfranchisement rate three to four times higher than the rates in predominantly white areas. The disenfranchisement effect "contributes to a vicious cycle . . . that further disadvantages low-income communities of color . . . [and] a diminished impact on public policy." People with felony arrests who may legally vote are 18 percent less likely to vote than those who have not been arrested; people in prison

who are allowed to vote are 27 percent less likely to do so than their nonincarcerated counterparts (Uggen and Manza 2005). Jeffrey Fagan (2006) and his colleagues found that, while poor neighborhoods had very low rates of voter participation in elections, the nonparticipation was not directly affected by the rate of incarceration. They showed that voter registration and participation rates were lower in neighborhoods with high rates of incarceration, especially in neighborhoods where enforcement of drug laws was the primary engine fueling the incarceration rate.

5. *Collective Action.* Lynch and Sabol (2004*b*, p. 157) investigated how incarceration affected community-level variables, including collective efficacy, in Baltimore neighborhoods. They found that "incarceration reduces community solidarity and attachment to communities" and weakens "the social processes on which social controls depend."

C. Public Safety

The concept of "coercive mobility" was developed by Rose and Clear (1998) to refer to two particular ways by which high rates of incarceration can increase crime in impoverished places. First, removal of young residents for imprisonment is a mobility process that affects crime (Shaw and McKay 1942). It changes the density and spread of what Bursik and Grasmick (1993) have called secondary relational networks. This reduces the capacity of those networks to link to resources outside the neighborhood and to bring them to bear on problems of people in the neighborhood. This weakens attachment to the neighborhood and ties to neighbors and thereby erodes the collective efficacy that Sampson and others have argued serves as a foundation for informal social control. The social stresses identified by Weatherburn and Lind (2001) are increased by incarceration-induced parental disruptions that lead to changes in the home and increased stresses on the home. Since these occur in the context of low social supports in highly economically stressed communities, parental incarceration generates the parental dysfunctions that lead to delinquency. In short, high rates of removal of parent-aged residents from poor communities set off a series of effects that destabilize the capacities of those communities to provide informal social control.

The second effect occurs with reentry into the community of those who were incarcerated. This is a much more straightforward effect.

Poor communities that absorb large numbers of people returning from prison have higher crime rates, not just because these people commit the crimes but also because they are needy residents who tie up the limited interpersonal and social resources of their families and networks, weakening the ability of the families and networks to perform other functions of informal social control and to import resources from outside the neighborhood—a problem Bursik and Grasmick (1993) have discussed. The coercive mobility thesis posits a tipping point at which the most deleterious effects of coercive mobility take effect after a large number of people are caught up in the removal and return cycle.

1. *Testing the Coercive Mobility Hypothesis.* The coercive mobility hypothesis has been tested by several researchers, with mixed results. In the first attempt, Clear et al. (2003) modeled the effect of 1995 incarceration rates on 1996 crime rates in Tallahassee neighborhoods, controlling for neighborhood-level measures of social disorganization (concentrated disadvantage), reentry rates in 1996, and violent crime in 1995. Using a quadratic for neighborhood incarceration rates, they tested for a nonlinear (tipping point) effect. They argue that this is a good test of the coercive mobility hypothesis because it models the effects of incarceration rates in one year on crime in a later year, controlling for previous levels of crime and neighborhood characteristics.

These results suggest that there are two different effects of neighborhoods' incarceration experiences on their rates of crime. One is linear: the number of people returning to prison has a direct and positive impact on crime, so that with each additional person reentering a neighborhood, the neighborhood's crime rate can be expected to increase. The second effect is curvilinear: "Increasing admissions to prison in one year has a negligible effect on crime at low levels, a negative effect on crime the following year when the rate is relatively low, but, after a certain concentration of residents is removed from the community through incarceration, the effect of additional admissions is to increase, not decrease, crime" (Clear et al. 2003, p. 55). This finding tends to confirm the coercive mobility hypothesis.

The Tallahassee coercive mobility model has been replicated in six locations. The first replication occurred in Tallahassee itself (Waring, Scully, and Clear 2005), where data from additional years were added to the original sample, allowing for analysis of effects of concentrated incarceration across a 9-year period, 1994–2002. Coercive mobility models equivalent to those originally published in 2002 were estimated. The results were virtually identical to those reported in the earlier paper (Clear et al. 2003). When these results are disaggregated for type of crime, there is curvilinearity for burglary, drug crime, and auto theft but not for robbery (Waring, Scully, and Clear 2005).

There have been five additional studies in other locations. Renauer and his colleagues (2006) employed the Tallahassee coercive mobility model on neighborhoods in Portland (Oregon), testing the effects of prison sentence removals in 2000 on crime in the following year. They found that, while coercive mobility variables were not significantly predictive of property crime (although the correlations were generally in the right direction), they were predictive of violent crime in the same curvilinear way as occurred in Tallahassee.

In Columbus (Ohio), a similar direct replication was attempted (Powell et al. 2004). The curves for violent crime are similar to those found in Tallahassee. For property crime, it is at the middle level that concentrated incarceration tended to lead to an increase in crime, and this effect was quite pronounced. Levels of crime began dropping at the highest levels of incarceration.

In Chicago, Susan George and her colleagues (George, LaLonde, and Schuble 2005) tested the effect of female incarceration in 1999 on drug crime in 2000. Studying female incarceration is an important extension of the Rose-Clear coercive mobility hypothesis. While the aggregate number of women who go through the incarceration process is much smaller than the aggregate number of men (about one-tenth), George and her colleagues found that drug crime is associated with incarceration of women in the same pattern elicited between total incarceration and total crime in Tallahassee.

In Cleveland and Baltimore (Bhati, Lynch, and Sabol 2005), coercive mobility models were substantially similar to those in the original Tallahassee analysis. When Bhati and his colleagues analyzed the data using an instrument, the findings changed, a result that is discussed more below.

Taken together, these results lend credence to, though only partial support for, the coercive mobility thesis as modeled by Clear et al. (2003). However, problems of sample size, control variables, and extreme cases make assessments of statistical significance problematic.

Two recent studies give additional credibility to the tipping point idea. Fagan and his colleagues (Fagan, West, and Holland 2003, p. 23) investigated the effects of incarceration on crime rates at the neighborhood level in New York City, from 1985 to 1996, and found that "over time, incarceration creates more incarceration in a spiraling dynamic." In a neighborhood study not involving incarceration, Robert J. Kane (2006) investigated the effect of "arrest rigor" (arrests for violent crime per officer) on rates of burglary and robbery in New York City precincts. He reports that "the study found a curvilinear relationship between arrests per officer and subsequent burglary and robbery rates; as arrests per officer increased, robbery and burglary decreased to a point; but when a threshold of arrest vigor was reached, robbery and burglary began to increase" (p. 208). Because arrest rates are so closely linked to incarceration rates, these results are consistent with the predictions of the coercive mobility hypothesis.

2. *Estimation Problems.* The general theme of this analysis is to propose that incarceration "causes" various social problems when it is concentrated in poor communities and, through them, causes crime. There are two substantial problems in applying a causal framework to these data: simultaneity and endogeneity.

Simultaneity is the idea that crime rates "cause" incarceration rates, while at the same time incarceration rates "cause" crime rates. The conceptual problem is that, while the theory posits that incarceration causes crime, it is far more straightforward to assume that crime causes incarceration—which could fully explain a positive correlation between incarceration and crime, even after statistical controls. The usual solution to this problem is to use time-ordered data to model the reciprocal effect, known as a nonrecursive path model.

Endogeneity arises when the relationship being displayed is spurious, because both crime and incarceration are caused by a third (unmodeled) variable. It is plausible, for example, that both crime and incarceration result from external processes, such as concentrated disadvantage and economic marginality. The usual way to address this problem is to include more variables in the study as statistical controls, making sure that the causal relationship between incarceration and crime is not eliminated when other factors are taken into account. Another option, one favored by economists, is to employ an exogenous variable as an instrument. Instrumentation is used to eliminate the correlation between crime and incarceration that is a result of the way crime "causes" incarceration, leaving only the part that results from the way incarceration causes crime.

3. *A Competition of Models.* Bhati and his colleagues (Bhati, Lynch, and Sabol 2005; see also Lynch and Sabol 2004*b*) approach the simultaneity and endogeneity problems by instrumentation. They employ drug arrests as an instrumental variable. Drug arrests are useful, they argue, because the number of drug arrests is directly related to the number of people going to prison, but drug arrests are elastic in the sense that there is a nearly inexhaustible supply of potential arrestees and so there need not be any relationship between crime and the rate of drug arrests. To further cleanse the simultaneity problem, they "take the residual of the regression of the change in drug arrest rates between 1987 and 1992 on the change in index crime rate over the same period and then regress the change in the prison admission rate on this residual. The instrument satisfies the conceptual and empirical requisites of an instrument: it was correlated with the incarceration rate and independent of the crime rate" (Lynch and Sabol 2004*b*, p. 150).

Lynch and Sabol's resulting analysis not only fails to confirm the results from the coercive mobility models described above but finds evidence of the opposite effect. When the instrument is added to their model, the sign for the relationship between incarceration and crime changes, with higher incarceration rates now predicting lower crime rates. (As indicated earlier, they also find that incarceration has negative impacts on some underlying processes of informal social control.) They conclude that their work provides "some support for both those who argue that high levels of incarceration undermine the ability of neighborhoods to perform their social functions and for those who allege that incarceration is beneficial for communities" (Lynch and Sabol 2004*b*, p. 158).

The results of instrumented models pose a profound challenge to the coercive mobility hypothesis. Yet the choice of an instrument is crucial. By using drug arrests, Lynch and Sabol have a plausible candidate but one that is potentially contaminated because the "discretionary portion" of the supply of potential arrests is linked to the very neighborhoods that have high rates of incarceration. In Chicago (George, LaLonde, and Schuble 2005), drug crime rates are associated with incarceration rates for women in exactly the manner predicted by the coercive mobility hypothesis. It is not clear whether using this variable as an instrument will elucidate the relationship or tend to eliminate the effects of how the coercive mobility process works in these neighborhoods. If the latter is the case, then the very places of interest—high-incarceration places—are controlled out of the model.

4. *Alternate Dependent Variables.* An ingenious way to avoid problems inherent in trying to model the relationship between adult incarcerations and adult crime is to incorporate a dependent variable that is clean of the simultaneity problems of adult crime. This would occur, for example, if one were to model the effect of adult incarcerations on juvenile crime. It can be argued that high rates of adult incarcerations, concentrated in the poorest communities, would lead to weakened supervision by parental or adult supervisory figures and that this would translate into more juvenile crime. But there is no plausible reason to think that increases in juvenile delinquency rates would increase the chances of adult incarceration in a given neighborhood.

This strategy has been used by Ralph Taylor and his colleagues (Taylor et al. 2006). They analyze the effects of adult arrest rates in Philadelphia police districts on later rates of serious juvenile delinquency between 1994 and 2004. Two of their findings are important. First, they find the familiar pattern, as have others who modeled coercive mobility directly, that higher rates of adult incarceration predict higher rates of lawbreaking in later periods. Second, they find that the effects of adult arrest rates on juvenile delinquency become more intensely associated with the neighborhood itself if more time is allowed to pass between the period of adult arrest and the rate of delinquency.

5. *Incarceration and Crime.* Every study to date that examines the effects of high rates of incarceration finds evidence of various problems for individuals and institutions. Studies find as well that incarceration has deleterious effects on community-level informal social control. The few studies that attempt to assess directly the effects of high rates of incarceration at the community level provide findings that are dependent on the modeling strategy selected. To date, there is no definitive answer to the question. What is to be made of this?

Despite the absence of a single, definitive study, it is hard to see how incarceration cannot be implicated as a problem for poor communities. There are simply too many studies that point to the problem for the hypothesized connection to be ignored. Incarceration is, after all, an intervention that is directed at the poorest communities, and it has the aim of imposing long-term negative consequences on the people who experience it. Most of those who are incarcerated return to those communities. There is good evidence that high rates of incarceration destabilize families, increase rates of delinquency, increase rates of teenage births, foster alienation of youth from prosocial norms, damage frail social networks, and weaken labor markets. It is a stretch of logic to think that concentrated incarceration could contribute to all of these problems, each of which tends to weaken informal social control, but somehow not erode the very public safety that depends upon informal social control. We cannot be sure that this is the case, but neither can we ignore the substantial probability.

There is, after all, a great deal at stake. The consequences of being wrong do not fall equally in both directions. If we approach incarceration as a problem that needs to be confronted, we will look for imaginative solutions that will have as their aim the reduction of a host of community problems stemming from mass confinement of community residents. If we are successful, we will strengthen families, reduce delinquency, decrease health problems, and establish a basis for a more vibrant labor market. If the coercive mobility thesis turns out to have been wrong, we will not, in the end, have reduced crime. As a package, this seems like a net improvement on the current situation in these impoverished places.

Alternatively, we might choose not to address the problems of incarceration in poor communities because we think it has not been sufficiently demonstrated that incarceration damages public safety. What if we are wrong? Then we will unwittingly contribute not only to the damage wreaked by mass imprisonment but also to the victimization resulting from crime rates that are kept high by it. Given these stakes, there is a clear moral requirement that we do something about mass incarceration of people from impoverished places.

III. What to Do: Research and Policy Implications

It seems that, at the very least, incarceration in impoverished places joins forces with an array of other problems to make things worse. There are ways in which incarceration also helps, but on balance there is good reason to think that, operating at very high levels, incarceration is more part of the problem than part of the solution. A tightly bound, mutually reinforcing set of interacting forces plays out in these places. Incarceration is one of them, breaking up families, subverting parental roles, weakening social control ties, further eroding an already attenuated labor market, and undermining confidence in the legal order. In these places, incarceration is one of the processes that maintains the criminal behavior of the current generation and helps produce the next generation of delinquents. But it is not known exactly how—and to what degree—incarceration is a cause of these problems or a result of them, or both.

A. Research Needs

The research agenda should focus on clarifying the nature of the link between incarceration and problematic outcomes in impoverished places. Longitudinal studies of a large sample of neighborhoods will help sort out the modeling problems, and the use of multiple outcome measures will offer a view inside the black box, to see how incarceration rates produce changes that relate to public safety. Since imprisonment almost certainly has both positive and negative effects in these neighborhoods, extensive sorts of data are needed to sort out the nature of the cause and effect relationships. Patterns of incarceration over lengthy periods—decades, at a minimum—will allow for more sensitive modeling of the reciprocal effects of incarceration rates on crime. If these data can be linked to family and social network data, hypotheses can be tested about precisely how the incarceration of a person in the network affects network- and family-level outcomes. It would be good, as well, to have individual-level data about the people being removed and returned, including especially their criminal history, to see if the effects are mediated by different kinds of arrest patterns and different types of people being incarcerated.

A more elaborate theoretical foundation will vastly improve the chances of addressing the modeling problem. The Rose-Clear "coercive mobility" framework is useful as a start, but ethnographic work has suggested that a specification that includes informal social control measures, social network measures, and family and personal health measures will provide a sounder test of how incarceration works when concentrated at the community level.

B. Policy Needs

The policy agenda is more challenging than the research agenda because the studies cited here turn contemporary crime policy on its head. Today, imprisonment is so naturally seen as the prime solution to any problem of social control that to lay out its role as an engine of crime shakes crime strategy at its core. Strategic adjustments will not be enough; rather, a basic rethinking of crime policy is necessary.

To be sure, the problem does not apply everywhere but concentrates in a subset of troubled neighborhoods, affecting a concentrated residential population. This is good news and bad news. The good news is that some solutions need not be systemwide. Community-specific projects can do some good. The bad news is that the fix, whatever it is, cannot be an intensified version of contemporary criminal justice thinking. Adjustments in crime policy that take account of the effects in these very poor places will be forced to challenge the premises of crime policy everywhere. We cannot arrest our way out of this problem—strategies of wholesale arrest are themselves a part of the problem. Just as clearly, however, we cannot ignore criminal behavior, somehow accepting that we have already exceeded the quota of arrests that serve the long-term public safety interests of these places.

The conundrum in these hard-hit places is not only that the justice system lacks the tools for the problem but that the three most commonly discussed policy ideas are essentially irrelevant. In today's policy environment, energetic discussions are devoted to debates between advocates for rehabilitation and proponents of punishment. There is a new industry of proposals for reentry programs, some emphasizing toughness, others emphasizing support. And the often weak voice of those who call for "alternatives to incarceration" also claims to address the problem of overincarceration.

None of these ideas can help much. The problem of mass incarceration is entirely produced by the simple mathematics of two pressure points—how many people enter prison and how long they stay there. Rehabilitation programs, reentry programs, and alternatives to incarceration do not have a track record that suggests big effects on these two pressure points. Even when they are successful, they work at the margins, reducing reentry to the prison system by a few percentage points, no more. All fail to address length of stay in any meaningful way. When these strategies fail—and they often do—they add to the numbers at each pressure point. Rehabilitation programs, reentry programs, and alternatives to incarceration are good ideas in their own right, and they deserve support, but they will not deal with the problem of high incarceration rates in impoverished places.

If the problem of mass incarceration is the large number of people who go into prison and how long they stay there, then the solution is for fewer to go in and for shorter stays. In other words, the solution is not programmatic; it is legislative. We need sentencing reform. There is no getting around this.

This is not the place to outline a systematic strategy for sentencing reform. It is sufficient here to call attention to the general outlines of just what such a strategy will involve. To work, a strategy will incorporate three areas of sentencing reform: doing away with prison penalties for ordinary drug crimes, eliminating mandatory minimum sentences for other felonies, and abolishing technical revocations of probation and parole. It will also roll back time served. One recent study concludes that these changes would reduce the prison population to about the level it had in the mid-1980s (Austin et al. 2007).

Most important of all, we have to adopt a new emphasis for the work of the justice system. As Donald Braman has said, "The question . . . is not merely how to punish and deter offenders, but how to encourage and strengthen the bonds that make families possible, give life to community, and ultimately determine the character of our society as a whole" (2004, p. 224).

This cannot be done without adopting a new philosophy of justice. We have recently completed a third of a century in which the dominant paradigm—a grand social experiment, if you will—has been a punitive form of retributive justice (Frost and Clear, forthcoming). It is time to declare that experiment a failure and to put an end to it. Until the well-being of those communities that are hit hard by both crime and justice is put at the forefront, the problems described in this essay will get worse.

REFERENCES

Austin, James, Todd Clear, Troy Duster, David F. Greenberg, John Irwin, Candace McCoy, Alan Mobley, Barbara Owen, and Joshua Page. 2007. *Unlocking America: Why and How to Reduce America's Prison Population.* Santa Monica, CA: JFA Institute.

Austin, James, Wendy Naro, and Tony Fabelo. 2007. *The 2006 National Prison Population Forecast.* Report of the JFA Institute. Philadelphia: Pew Charitable Trust.

Bhati, Avi, James Lynch, and William Sabol. 2005. "Baltimore and Cleveland: Incarceration and Crime at the Neighborhood Level." Paper presented at the meetings of the American Society of Criminology, Toronto, November 18.

Blumstein, Alfred, and Allen Beck. 1999. "Population Growth in U.S. Prisons, 1980–1996." In *Prisons*, edited by Michael Tonry and Joan Petersilia. Vol. 26 of *Crime and Justice: An Annual Review of Research*, edited by Michael Tonry. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Braman, Donald. 2004. *Doing Time on the Outside: Incarceration and Family Life in America*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Browning, Christopher R., Seth L. Feinberg, and Robert D. Dietz. 2004. "The Paradox of Social Organization: Networks, Collective Efficacy, and Violent Crime in Urban Neighborhoods." *Social Forces* 83(2):505–34.

Bursik, Robert J., Jr., and Harold G. Grasmick. 1993. *Neighborhoods and Crime: The Dimensions of Effective Community Control*. New York: Lexington.

Cadora, Eric. 2007. "Structural Racism and Neighborhood Incarceration." Paper presented at the Aspen Roundtable on Mass Incarceration, Aspen, CO, June 3.

Carlson, Bonnie, and Neil Cervera. 1992. *Inmates and Their Wives*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.

Cho, Rosa, and Robert LaLonde. 2005. "The Impact of Incarceration in State Prison on the Employment Prospects of Women." IZA Discussion Paper no. 1792, October. http://www.ssrn.com/abstract=826456.

Christian, Johnna R. 2004. "Exploring the Effects of Incarceration on Communities." PhD diss., School of Criminal Justice, University at Albany.

Clear, Todd R. 2007. *Imprisoning Communities: How Mass Incarceration Makes Disadvantaged Places Worse*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Clear, Todd R., Dina R. Rose, Elin Waring, and Kristen Scully. 2003. "Coercive Mobility and Crime: A Preliminary Examination of Concentrated Incarceration and Social Disorganization." *Justice Quarterly* 20(1):33–64.

Crutchfield, Robert D. 2005. "Neighborhoods, Collective Efficacy, and Inmate Release: A Summary of Preliminary Analyses." Unpublished manuscript. Seattle: Department of Sociology, University of Washington.

Darity, William A., and Samuel L. Myers Jr. 1994. *The Black Underclass: Critical Essays on Race and Unwantedness*. New York: Garland.

Dominguez, Silvia, and Celeste Watkins. 2003. "Creating Networks for Survival and Mobility: Social Capital among African-American and Latin-American Low-Income Mothers." *Social Problems* 50(1):111–35.

Edin, Kathryn, and Laura Lein. 1997. "Work, Welfare, and Single Mothers' Economic Survival Strategies." *American Sociological Review* 62(2):253–66.

Edin, Kathryn, Timothy Nelson, and Rechelle Paranal. 2004. "Fatherhood and Incarceration as Potential Turning Points in the Criminal Careers of Unskilled Men." In *Imprisoning America: The Social Effects of Mass Incarceration*, edited by Mary Pattillo, David Weiman, and Bruce Western. New York: Russell Sage.

Fagan, Jeffrey. 2004. "Crime, Law, and the Community Dynamics of Incarceration in New York City." In *The Future of Imprisonment in the 21st Century*, edited by Michael Tonry. New York: Oxford University Press.

———. 2006. “Incarceration and Voting.” Unpublished memorandum. New York: Project on Concentrated Incarceration, Open Society Institute.
Fagan, Jeffrey, and Richard B. Freeman. 1999. “Crime and Work.” In *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, vol. 25, edited by Michael Tonry. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Fagan, Jeffrey, Valerie West, and Jan Holland. 2003. “Reciprocal Effects of Crime and Incarceration in New York City Neighborhoods.” Unpublished manuscript. New York: Center for Violence Research and Prevention, Columbia University.
Felson, Marcus. 2003. “The Process of Co-offending.” In *Theory for Practice in Situational Crime Prevention*, edited by Margaret J. Smith and Derek B. Cornish. *Crime Prevention Studies*, vol. 16. Monsey, NY: Criminal Justice Press.
Freeman, Richard B. 1992. “Crime and Unemployment of Disadvantaged Youth.” In *Drugs, Crime and Social Isolation: Barriers to Urban Opportunity*, edited by Adele Harrell and George Peterson. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
Frost, Natasha, and Todd R. Clear. Forthcoming. “The Great Punishment Experiment.” *Studies in Law, Politics, and Society.*
Gendreau, Paul, Claire Groggin, and Francis T. Cullen. 1999. “The Effects of Prison Sentences on Recidivism.” Report prepared for the Solicitor General Canada, cat. no. J42-87/199E. Ottawa: Public Works and Services of Canada.
George, Susan, Robert LaLonde, and Todd Schuble. 2005. “Socio-economic Indicators, Criminal Activity, and the Concentration of Female Ex-Prisoners in Chicago Neighborhoods.” Unpublished manuscript. Chicago: University of Chicago.
Granovetter, Mark. 1993. “The Strength of Weak Ties.” *American Journal of Sociology* 78(6):1360–80.
Grogger, Jeffrey. 1995. “The Effect of Arrests on the Employment and Earnings of Young Men.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 110(1):51–71.
Harrison, Paige M., and Allen J. Beck. 2006. “Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2005.” In *Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin.* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
Holzer, Harry J. 2007. “Collateral Costs: The Effects of Incarceration on Employment and Earnings among Young Men.” Paper presented to the Russell Sage Incarceration Policy Working Group, Russell Sage Foundation, New York, May 3.
Huebner, Beth M. 2005. “The Effect of Incarceration on Marriage and Work in the Life Course.” *Justice Quarterly* 22(3):281–301.
Hughes, Timothy A., Doris James Wilson, and Allen J. Beck. 2001. *Trends in State Parole, 1990–2000.* Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
Hunter, Albert J. 1985. “Private, Parochial and Public Social Orders: The Problem of Crime and Incivility in Urban Communities.” In *The Challenge of Social Control: Citizenship and Institution Building in Modern Society*, edited by Gerald D. Suttles and Mayer N. Zald. Norwood, NJ: Aldex.
Johnson, Rucker C. 2007. “Intergenerational Risks of Criminal Involvement

and Incarceration." Paper presented to the Russell Sage Incarceration Policy Working Group, Russell Sage Foundation, New York, May 3.

Johnson, Rucker C., and Steven Raphael. 2005. "The Effects of Male Incarceration on Dynamics of AIDS Infection Rates among African-American Women and Men." Unpublished manuscript. Berkeley: Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California.

Kane, Robert J. 2006. "On the Limits of Social Control: Structural Deterrence and the Policing of Suppressible Crimes." *Justice Quarterly* 23(2):186–213.

Kessler, Daniel, and Steven D. Levitt. 1999. "Using Sentence Enhancements to Distinguish between Deterrence and Incapacitation." *Journal of Law and Economics* 42(1):343–63.

King, Ryan S., and Marc Mauer. 2004. *The Vanishing Black Electorate: Felony Disenfranchisement in Atlanta, Georgia*. Washington, DC: Sentencing Project.

Kling, Jeffrey. 1999. "The Effect of Prison Sentence Length on Subsequent Employment and Earnings of Criminal Defendants." Discussion Paper on Economics no. 208. Princeton, NJ: Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University.

Kovandzic, Tomislav, and Lynne M. Vieraitis. 2006. "The Effect of County-Level Prison Population Growth on Crime Rates." *Criminology and Public Policy* 5(2):101–32.

LaLonde, Robert, and Susan George. 2003. "Incarcerated Mothers: The Project on Female Prisoners and Their Children." Unpublished manuscript. New York: Open Society Institute.

LeBlanc, Adrian Nicole. 2004. *Random Family: Love, Drugs, Trouble, and Coming of Age in the Bronx*. New York: Scribner.

Liedka, Raymond V., Anne Morrison Piehl, and Bert Useem. 2006. "The Crime Control Effects of Incarceration: Does Scale Matter?" *Criminology and Public Policy* 5(2):245–76.

Lynch, James P., and William J. Sabol. 2004*a*. "Assessing the Effects of Mass Incarceration on Informal Social Control in Communities." *Criminology and Public Policy* 3(2):267–94.

———. 2004*b*. "Effects of Incarceration on Informal Social Control in Communities." In *Imprisoning America: The Social Effects of Mass Incarceration*, edited by Mary Pattillo, David Weiman, and Bruce Western. New York: Russell Sage.

Martone, Cynthia. 2005. *Loving through Bars: Children with Parents in Prison*. Santa Monica, CA: Santa Monica Press.

Marvell, Thomas B., and Carlisle E. Moody. 1997. "The Impact of Prison Growth on Homicide." *Homicide Studies* 1(3):205–33.

Mumola, Christopher. 2000. "Incarcerated Parents and Their Children." Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice.

Murray, Joseph. 2005. "The Effects of Imprisonment on the Families and Children of Prisoners." In *The Effects of Imprisonment*, edited by Allison Liebling and Shadd Maruna. Cullompton, Devon, UK: Willan.

Murray, Joseph, and David P. Farrington. In this volume. "Effects of Parental Imprisonment on Children."

Nurse, Anne M. 2004. "Returning to Strangers: Newly Paroled Young Fathers and Their Children." In *Imprisoning America: The Social Effects of Mass Incarceration*, edited by Mary Pattillo, David Weiman, and Bruce Western. New York: Russell Sage.

Pettit, Becky, and Bruce Western. 2004. "Mass Imprisonment and the Life Course: Race and Class Inequality in U.S. Incarceration." *American Sociological Review* 69(2):151–69.

Phillips, Susan D., Alaatin Erkanli, Gordon P. Keeler, E. Jane Costello, and Adrian Angold. 2006. "Disentangling the Risks: Parent Criminal Justice Involvement and Child's Exposure to Family Risks." *Criminology and Public Policy* 5(4):101–206.

Pogarsky, Greg, Alan J. Lizotte, and Terence P. Thornberry. 2003. "The Delinquency of Children Born to Young Mothers: Results from the Rochester Youth Development Study." *Criminology* 41(4):1249–86.

powell, john a., Ruth D. Peterson, Lauren J. Krivo, Paul E. Bellair, and Kecia Johnson. 2004. "The Impact of Mass Incarceration on Columbus, Ohio." Unpublished manuscript. Columbus: Ohio State University.

Raphael, Steve, and Michael A. Stoll. 2007. "Why Are So Many Americans in Prison?" Paper presented to the Russell Sage Incarceration Policy Working Group, Russell Sage Foundation, New York, May 3.

Renauer, Brian C., Wm. Scott Cunningham, Bill Feyerherm, Tom O'Connor, and Paul Bellatty. 2006. "Tipping the Scales of Justice: The Effect of Overincarceration on Neighborhood Violence." *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 17(3): 362–79.

Rengifo, Andres. 2007. "Neighborhood Effects and Informal Social Control: Examining the Role of Social Networks on the South Bronx." PhD dissertation, Program in Criminal Justice, Graduate School of the City University of New York.

Rengifo, Andres, and Elin Waring. 2005. "A Network Perspective on the Impact of Incarceration on Communities." Paper presented to the annual meetings of the American Society of Criminology, Toronto, November 17.

Roberts, Dorothy. 2004. "The Social and Moral Cost of Mass Incarceration in African American Communities." *Stanford Law Review* 56(5):1271–1305.

Rose, Dina R., and Todd R. Clear. 1998. "Incarceration, Social Capital and Crime: Examining the Unintended Consequences of Incarceration." *Criminology* 36(3):441–79.

Sabol, William J., and James P. Lynch. 2003. "Assessing the Longer-Run Effects of Incarceration: Impact on Families and Employment." In *Crime Control and Social Justice: The Delicate Balance*, edited by Darnell Hawkins, Samuel Myers Jr., and Randolph Stine. Westport, CT: Greenwood.

Sampson, Robert J., Stephen W. Raudenbush, and Felton Earls. 1997. "Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy." *Science* 277(August):918–24.

Shaw, Clifford R., and Henry D. McKay. 1942. *Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Smith, Paula, Claire Goggin, and Paul Gendreau. 2002. *The Effects of Prison*

Sentences and Intermediate Sanctions on Recidivism: General Effects and Individual Differences. Ottawa: Public Works and Government Services of Canada.

Spelman, William. 2000*a*. "The Limited Importance of Prison Expansion." In *The Crime Drop in America*, edited by Alfred Blumstein and Joel Walman. New York: Cambridge University Press.

———. 2000*b*. "What Recent Studies Do (and Don't) Tell Us about Imprisonment and Crime." In *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, vol. 27, edited by Michael Tonry. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Stemen, Don. 2007. *Reconsidering Incarceration: New Directions for Reducing Crime*. New York: Vera Institute of Justice.

St. Jean, Peter. 2006. "The Buffalo Neighborhoods Project." Unpublished manuscript. Buffalo: University of Buffalo, State University of New York.

Sullivan, Mercer L. 1989. *Getting Paid: Youth, Crime and Work in the Inner City*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Sweeten, Gary, and Robert Apel. Forthcoming. "Incapacitation: Revisiting an Old Question with a New Method and New Data." *Journal of Quantitative Criminology.*

Taylor, Ralph, John Goldkamp, Phil Harris, Peter Jones, Maria Garcia, and Eric McCord. 2006. "Community Justice Impacts over Time: Adult Arrest Rates, Male Serious Delinquency Prevalence, Rates within and between Philadelphia Communities." Paper presented at the Eastern Sociological Society meetings, Boston, February.

Thomas, Adam. 2005. "The Old Ball and Chain: Unlocking the Correlation between Incarceration and Marriage." Unpublished manuscript. Cambridge, MA: John F. Kennedy School, Harvard University.

Thomas, James C., and Elizabeth Torrone. 2006. "Incarceration as Forced Migration: Effects on Selected Community Health Outcomes." *American Journal of Public Health* 96(10):1–5.

Tyler, Tom R., and Jeffrey Fagan. 2005. "Legitimacy and Cooperation: Why Do People Help the Police Fight Crime in Their Communities?" Columbia Public Law Research Paper no. 06-99. http://www.ssrn.com/ abstract.

Uggen, Christopher, and Jeff Manza. 2005. "Lost Voices: The Civic and Political Views of Disenfranchised Felons." In *Imprisoning America: The Social Effects of Mass Incarceration*, edited by Mary Pattillo, David Weiman, and Bruce Western. New York: Russell Sage.

———. 2006. *Locked Out: Felon Disenfranchisement and American Democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Uggen, Christopher, Sara Wakefield, and Bruce Western. 2005. "Work and Family Perspectives on Reentry." In *Prisoner Reentry and Crime in America*, edited by Jeremy Travis and Christy Visher. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Venkatesh, Sudhir Alladi. 1997. "The Social Organization of Street Gang Activity in an Urban Ghetto." *American Journal of Sociology* 103(1):82–111.

———. 2006. *Off the Books: The Underground Economy of the Urban Poor*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Waring, Elin, Kristen Scully, and Todd R. Clear. 2005. "Coercive Mobility in an Eight-Year Tallahassee Sample: A Follow-Up of the Original Tallahassee Coercive Mobility Study." Paper presented to the Consortium to Study Concentrated Incarceration in Poor Communities, a project of the Open Society Institute, New York, April 20.

Weatherburn, Don, and Bronwyn Lind. 2001. *Delinquency-Prone Communities*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Webster, Cheryl Marie, Anthony N. Doob, and Franklin E. Zimring. 2006. "Proposition 8 and Crime Rates in California: The Case of the Disappearing Deterrent." *Criminology and Public Policy* 5(3):1501–28.

Western, Bruce. 2006. *Punishment and Inequality in America*. New York: Russell Sage.

Western, Bruce, Jeffrey Kling, and David Weiman. 2001. "The Labor Market Consequences of Incarceration." *Crime and Delinquency* 47(3):410–38.

Western, Bruce, Leonard M. Lopoo, and Sara McLanahan. 2004. "Incarceration and the Bonds between Parents in Fragile Families." In *Imprisoning America: The Social Effects of Mass Incarceration*, edited by Mary Pattillo, David Weiman, and Bruce Western. New York: Russell Sage.

Western, Bruce, Mary Pattillo, and David Weiman. 2004. In *Imprisoning America: The Social Effects of Mass Incarceration*, edited by Mary Pattillo, David Weiman, and Bruce Western. New York: Russell Sage.