



The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences

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Jeremy Travis and Bruce Western, Editors; Committee on Causes and Consequences of High Rates of Incarceration; Committee on Law and Justice; Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education; National Research Council

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The Growth of **INCARCERATION** in the United States

Exploring Causes and Consequences

Committee on Causes and Consequences of High Rates of Incarceration

Jeremy Travis, Bruce Western, and Steve Redburn, *Editors*

Committee on Law and Justice

Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education

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Preface

The growth of incarceration rates in the United States for more than four decades has spawned commentary and a growing body of scientific knowledge about its causes and the consequences for those imprisoned, their families and communities, and U.S. society. Recognizing the importance of summarizing what is known (and not known) about the many questions this phenomenon has raised, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) of the U.S. Department of Justice and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation requested a study by the National Research Council (NRC). We are grateful for support throughout the study from the current and former NIJ directors, John Laub and Greg Ridgeway, and from our program officers at the MacArthur Foundation, Laurie Garduque and Craig Wacker. This report is the product of that 2-year effort, conducted by an ad hoc committee created by the National Research Council to assess the evidence and draw out its implications for public policy. I and the other members of the study committee hope it will inform an extensive and thoughtful public debate about and reconsideration of the policies that led to the current situation.

Special thanks are owed to the late James Q. Wilson who chaired the Committee on Law and Justice (CLAJ) at the time the study was conceived more than 5 years ago. Recognizing the importance of this issue, he organized a subcommittee of Phil Cook, Duke University; Glenn Loury, Brown University; Tracey Meares, Yale Law School; and myself to develop a study idea for CLAJ's approval. At a meeting held at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in January 2009, led by former CLAJ director Carol Petrie, a group of scholars helped develop parameters for a study of high rates of

incarceration. NIJ and the MacArthur Foundation subsequently recognized that such a study would come at an important moment in the nation's history and could make a significant contribution to public understanding and to improving the justice system.

On the committee's behalf, I thank the many individuals and organizations who assisted us in our work and without whom this study could not have been completed. Several scholars conducted original analyses and working papers for the committee. Alfred Blumstein, Carnegie Mellon University, and Alan Beck, Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, updated their classic analysis of changes in incarceration levels. Other contributors included Doris MacKenzie, Penn State University; Richard Rosenfeld, University of Missouri, St. Louis; Susan Turner, University of California, Irvine; Sara Wakefield, University of California, Irvine; and Christopher Wildeman, Yale University, who provided detailed analyses on various topics of interest to the committee ranging from crime rates to prison programs to research needed to address knowledge gaps identified in the report. Bettina Muenster, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, was a valuable consultant to the committee, most especially in her reviews of several important parts of the literature. Peter Reuter, University of Maryland, College Park, and Jonathan Caulkins, Carnegie Mellon University, provided insights from their work on drug crime. Eric Cadora and Charles Swartz of the Justice Mapping Center, Rutgers University School of Criminal Justice, provided community maps of incarceration. Steven Raphael, University of California, Berkeley, and Michael Stoll, University of California, Los Angeles, generously shared advanced text of their now-published book on why so many people are in prison. In addition, a number of colleagues reviewed the research literature for specific chapters: Scott Allen, University of California, Riverside; Dora Dumont, Miriam Hospital, Providence, RI; Wade Jacobsen, Princeton University; and Jessica Simes, Harvard University.

Sixteen individuals participated in a December 2012 public workshop on health and incarceration, organized by committee member Josiah Rich, which informed that element of the committee's work. Other participants were committee members Craig Haney, Bruce Western, and Scott Allen, University of California, Riverside; Redonna Chandler, National Institute on Drug Abuse; Jennifer Clarke, Brown University Medical Center; Jamie Fellner, Human Rights Watch; Robert B. Greifinger, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY; Newton Kendig, Federal Bureau of Prisons; Marc Mauer, The Sentencing Project; Fred Osher, Council of State Governments; Steven Rosenberg, Community Oriented Correctional Health Services; Faye S. Taxman, George Mason University; Emily Wang, Yale University; Christopher Wildeman, Yale University; and Brie Williams, University of California, San Francisco. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation provided support for the preparation and publication of a summary of that

workshop (available through the National Academies Press, http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=18372).

All of us recognize that the study would not be what it is—in the depth of analysis, quality of writing, or force of its conclusions—without the efforts of the committee’s vice chair, Bruce Western. I thank him not only for his innumerable substantive contributions to the report, but also for his thoughtful leadership at critical times during the committee’s deliberations.

One member of the study committee, Jeffrey Beard, resigned in late 2013. He concluded that his obligations as secretary of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, a position he assumed after having been appointed to the committee, precluded him from participating in the final stages of the committee’s deliberations. We are indebted to him for his contributions to the committee’s early work.

Committee member Ricardo H. Hinojosa has written a supplementary statement, which is Appendix A. In it he expresses concerns about the report’s discussion and certain conclusions related to the causes of high rates of incarceration and their effect on crime prevention, based on his judicial experience. However, he does support the panel’s recommendations and the importance of their consideration by the public and policy makers.

This study and report have benefited from the valuable assistance of many NRC staff within CLAJ. Steve Redburn, scholar and study director, oversaw meeting agendas and schedules for the production of this report. In the assembly of the report, he was assisted by Malay Majmundar, senior program officer, and Julie Schuck, senior program associate, to work collaboratively with the committee members to integrate their ideas, analyses, writings, and conclusions into a sound report. Barbara Boyd, administrative coordinator, made sure the committee’s study and meetings ran smoothly, gathered data and created several figures in this report, as well as provided bibliographic assistance. The former CLAJ director, Jane Ross, offered wise guidance at the start of the committee’s deliberations. The current CLAJ director, Arlene Lee, provided leadership and intellectual rigor in the final phases of production of this report to ensure that its complex messages were well-grounded. Conversations with Robert Hauser, executive director, and Mary Ellen O’Connell, deputy executive director, of the Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education helped the committee strengthen the presentation of its conclusions and the articulation of normative principles for the use of incarceration.

We also thank the many other NRC staff members who assisted the committee in its work. Anthony Mann provided administrative support as needed. Kirsten Sampson Snyder shepherded the report through the NRC review process; Eugenia Grohman helped edit the draft report; Yvonne Wise processed the report through final production; and Patty Morison offered guidance on communication of the study results. The staff of the NRC

library and research center, Daniel Bearss, Colleen Willis, Ellen Kimmel, and Rebecca Morgan, provided valuable assistance on the report bibliography. We also appreciate the efforts of Rona Briere and Alisa Decatur in their editing of the final text.

This report has been reviewed in draft form by individuals chosen for their diverse perspectives and technical expertise, in accordance with procedures approved by the NRC's Report Review Committee. The purpose of this independent review is to provide candid and critical comments that will assist the institution in making its published report as sound as possible and to ensure that the report meets institutional standards for objectivity, evidence, and responsiveness to the charge. The review comments and draft manuscript remain confidential to protect the integrity of the deliberative process.

I thank the following individuals for their review of this report: Anthony A. Braga, Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management at Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard University, and School of Criminal Justice, Rutgers University; Shawn Bushway, Program on the Economics of Crime and Justice Policy, School of Criminal Justice, University at Albany, State University of New York; Michael Flamm, Department of History, Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio; Michael Gottfredson, University of Oregon; Peter Greenwood, Advancing EBP, Agoura, California; Martin F. Horn, John Jay College, City University of New York, and New York State Sentencing Commission; Randall L. Kennedy, School of Law, Harvard University; Kenneth C. Land, Department of Sociology, Duke University; Marc Mauer, The Sentencing Project, Washington, DC; Theda Skocpol, Scholars Strategy Network and Department of Government and Sociology, Harvard University; Cassia Spohn, School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Arizona State University; Christopher Uggen, Department of Sociology, University of Minnesota; Lester N. Wright, School of Population Health, University of Adelaide, and School of Medicine, Flinders University, Adelaide, South Australia; Mark H. Moore, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University; and Sara Rosenbaum, Department of Health Policy, School of Public Health and Health Services, George Washington University.

Although the reviewers listed above provided many constructive comments and suggestions, they were not asked to endorse the conclusions and recommendations nor did they see the final draft of the report before its release. The review of this report was overseen by Mark Moore, Harvard University, and Sara Rosenbaum, George Washington University. Appointed by the NRC, they were responsible for making certain that an independent examination of this report was carried out in accordance with institutional procedures and that all review comments were carefully considered.

Responsibility for the final content of this report, however, rests entirely with the authoring committee and the institution.

More than 5 years ago, CLAJ recognized that the time had come to marshal the best science and gain insight into how incarceration had reached exceptional levels and with what consequences. To that end, we on the study committee committed ourselves to reaching the consensus presented in this report through open-hearted deliberation and collaborative spirit. Our work will be judged a contribution to the extent that it informs a robust public discourse on these matters with scientific evidence and thoughtful reflection on the purposes and proper limits of incarceration.

Jeremy Travis, *Chair*
Committee on Causes and Consequences of
High Rates of Incarceration in the United States

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