

The United States has roughly 2.3 million people incarcerated¹ and at an approximate average expense of \$36,000 a year per prisoner translates to 80 billion dollars on corrections annually.² Comparing U.S. Department of Education budgetary statistics, the U.S. spends three times as much on reacting to crime than on education. The comparison is not whimsical. Marc Mauree noted in 1994³ some of the main factors contributing to crime are "poverty, drug abuse, poor education, and family breakdown." He went on to say "[a]ddressing these problems should have more of an impact on crime than continuing to expand the prison population." No honest person can deny that fact today after almost 30 years of intense mass incarceration and crime rates remaining, more or less, where they were in the 1980s during the beginning of the incarceration build up.⁴

Later in that same paper, Mauree examines "three key issues" that reveal why incarceration has such a "modest impact on crime": 1. The "Criminal Justice Funnel"; 2. The Impact of Demographics; and, 3. The "Replacement" Effect.⁵ These last two are most consequential to addressing crime today. Looking at demographical impact two things are unavoidable: criminals "age out" of deviant behavior and 15-18 year old males have the highest incidence of criminality. These correlate because six years after the 15-18 criminality onset incidence rates drop to half and each subsequent year probability of criminality continues to decrease and

diminishes societal benefits to almost none. The "Replacement" effect also relates because, as is the case with drug dealing - being compelled by demand, unless the conditions that contribute to crime are addressed the need for greater incarceration and of more incapacitation will persist; each new generation reinitiating the 15-18 crime onset.

Tough on crime does not work which is why policy makers have changed gears to smart on crime. Smart on crime means addressing poverty, drug abuse, poor education and family breakdown. Of the four, tackling poor education is the only viable course.

Caroline Wolf Harlow, a statistician with the U.S. Department of Justice⁶, found that 59% of persons in federal facilities and 75% in state prisons are high school dropouts. U.S. DOJ, in a 2003 Bureau of Justice Special Report, noted 65% of prisoners lacked a high school diploma, 23% graduated, and a scant 13% had any college education. Socially, this translates to over half all dropouts being unemployed according to a study by Prison Policy and Northeastern University. On average incarcerated people had an annual income 40% less than median income their non-dropout, unincarcerated contemporaries. Not graduating or dropping out either leads to poverty or perpetuates it. Poverty leads to drug abuse and/or criminality. These lead to imprisonment and incarceration to family

breakdown. Therefore, addressing the educational factors will produce the greatest possible, positive effects.

There are several benefits besides to investing in education as a method to combat our untenable reliance on incarceration. Other than affecting poverty, education can improve generational outcomes in families. For society and prisoners, its impact is even greater. In 2016, the RAND Corporation found prisoners who participated in educational programs while incarcerated were 43% less likely to recidivate.⁷ Nationally, the recidivism rate is about 60%. In Arizona, figures showed post-secondary education program participants had a mere 10% recidivism rate.⁸ Kathleen Bender with the Center for American Progress noted that "for every dollar spent on prison education, taxpayers are estimated to save four to five dollars that would have been spent on incarceration."⁹ In economic terms around 60 billion dollars of labor lost because we focus on incarceration.¹⁰

On one hand, it costs about 14,000 dollars for an online degree today. That degree opens the doorways to immense economic opportunities and social mobility leading out of poverty-drugs-crime-incarceration-family breakdown cycles and into the benefits of a safer society, a more robust economy, less dependence on government aid programs, less crime, and decreased need to incarcerate. On the other, it costs nearly three times that same amount

to incapacitate someone yearly for committing a crime. This applies across the board— from low-level to high profile, violent offenders.

The current employment of incarceration is a massive disservice to society.¹¹ Upwards of 95% of all people incarcerated today will one day return to society. What happens presently is people are convicted, sentenced harshly, this to deter future wrongs— theirs and others', warehoused in a facility for however long then, released to society in the same circumstances they went to prison with; except, they are older and may have a GED. The conditions which led to their criminality still exist and, generally, they reoffend. United States' Sentencing Commission (USSC) found nearly 61% of those who did not complete high school were rearrested while those with college degrees were at under 20%. The Vera Institute of Justice, in 2016, found only 35% of state prisons provided college-level education and these are only made available to a miniscule 6% of prisoners nationwide.

In 2017, New York awarded more than 7 million dollars to colleges there— including Cornell and New York Universities— to provide prison classes. California has been engaged in similar activities for years and there is the aforementioned Arizona. Along with Connecticut, Michigan, Mississippi, New Jersey, Rhode Island and South Carolina.^{12,13} California and New York are among the states who

have successfully reduced their penal populations without detrimental effects public safety. Many different approaches were used but a common thread was educational programs. Also common was bipartisan legislation and executive branch initiative. "Smart on Crime" means acknowledging the social ill our over-reliance on incarceration has created.

As the foregoing illustrates, addressing the prevalence of poor education among prison populations has the greatest potentiality socially - in terms of economy, crime, recidivism, public safety - and individually - regards family breakdown, poverty, drug abuse. Incarceration does not solve crime. If the last four plus decades have demonstrated nothing else, they clearly show: It costs less to educate than incarcerate.

End notes:

1. Compagno, Emily. The Five. Fox News Channel (04/23/2014); Bender, Kathleen. Education Opportunities in Prison Are Key to Reducing Crime. Center for American Progress (2018)
2. Report. Hamilton Project (2010)
3. Mauer, Marc. Americans Behind Bars: The International Use of Incarceration: 1992-1993. The Sentencing Project (1994)
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. visit www.boj.gov
7. see Endnote 1; Bender, Kathleen, ibid.
8. Sheldon, Randall G. It's More Profitable to Treat the Disease Than to Prevent It: Why the PIC Needs Crime. Center for Juvenile and Criminal Justice (2004)
9. see Endnote 1; Bender, Kathleen, ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Geringrich, Newt and Jones, Van. Prison System is Failing America. Opinion. CNN (05/22/14)
12. Schreantz, Dennis, Debor, Stephen T.; and Mauer, Marc. Decarceration Strategies: How 5 States Achieved Substantial Prison Population Reductions. The Sentencing Project (2018)
13. Mauer, Marc and Nazgol Ghandooosh, PhD. Fewer Prisoners, Less Crime: A Tale of Three States. Policy Brief. The Sentencing Project (c. 2015)