

Injustices of Mass Incarceration

Name

Institutional Affiliation

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Racial discrimination is a malignant injustice in the American criminal justice system. America is struggling with non-violent drug offences and alcohol abuse mostly common among African-Americans and other groups from low socio-economic backgrounds. In its efforts to curb these crimes, the American criminal justice system has been advancing mass incarceration as the most viable intervention. However, these criminal justice response targets minorities and poor communities that have no proper economic and educational prospects because of their marginalization. With this state of affairs, mass incarceration is characterized by numerous injustices, including inequality and discrimination. Being wealthy in America, as opposed to being innocent, is the surest way of avoiding imprisonment. The criminal justice officials laud incarceration as the quickest intervention that can be used in responding to crime and deterring offenders in communities. However, in the long-run, the practice causes more problems, violates human rights and generates massive family instability in the minority communities.

The justice system in America treats people fairly when they are wealthy and guilty than when they are poor and innocent. What shapes the criminal justice outcomes is wealth and not culpability. In a speech titled "We need to talk about an Injustice", Bryan Stevenson shares some of the realities about the justice system in America. According to Stevenson, one of the greatest plagues in the US justice system is massive imbalances that disadvantage African Americans and other racial minorities in the country. Statistically, a third of the African-American men have been subjected to incarceration at some point in the course of their lives (Stevenson, 2012). This trend suggests that the criminal justice system exists to target African Americans who are heavily involved in drug and alcohol abuse because of their economic challenges.

Mass incarceration has left most households in the African American communities impoverished and dysfunctional. For example, most African Americans who are locked up in prisons are productive citizens in their 20s. As cited by Stevenson, at least one in every three African Americans aged between 18 and 30 is currently imprisoned, placed on parole or probation. In his observation, 300,000 Americans were in prisons and jails in 1972. This number has increased to 2.3 million today, even though the rates of violent crimes remain stable (Stevenson, 2012). When members of this productive population spend most of their time in prison, the African American community cannot develop or advance. Young men leave their families languishing in abject poverty without any person to provide for their needs. Children from affected families struggle to provide for their needs; women struggle with the problems of unemployment and some of them resort to crime. As a result, the circle of crime becomes recurrent, indicating that mass incarceration efforts are counterproductive.

The criminal justice system also violates the human rights of minority communities in its war on drugs efforts. Prison conditions are hostile, and they do not meet the standards that require the protection of the human rights of prisoners. Stevenson explains that one in every nine convicts sent to death row is determined to be innocent and absolved. The implication is that the system is riddled with errors and should not be used excessively in response to crime. The justice system has become so paranoid that it dishonours the provisions of the American Bill of Rights in its efforts to fight crime. Specifically, African Americans are arrested arbitrarily in the efforts to curb drug abuse in the country. As a result of human rights violations, racial profiling continues to deepen in American society, and many minority groups continue to suffer from tribal prejudice. The best that imprisonment does is to deepen the rates of poverty because when ex-offenders re-enter their communities, they have to struggle to rebuild their lives and they find

they have to struggle with their utterly impoverished families. Without economic opportunities, ex-offenders are compelled to reoffenders in their effort to fend for their needs.

When people do not care about things, that matter, such as poverty, injustice and inequality, American identity is exposed to numerous risks. The justice system needs to use alternative methods in dealing with offenders. Minority communities need to be economically empowered, provided with the right education, and drug offenders need thorough rehabilitation to help them lead normal lives. The government should also consider making the education system affordable to all to enable children from low socio-economic backgrounds to stay in school instead of languishing in the slums and streets. Also, instead of targeting racial minorities involved in petty offenses, law enforcement officials need to change their focus and deal with hardcore criminals. Non-violent crimes need to be dealt with using lenient and community-based approaches to reduce overcrowding in prisons. Community-oriented sentencing methods probation, community service orders, and parole need to be increasingly used in addressing the threats posed by low-level drug offenders. Importantly, the government needs to reform criminal justice and make it more impartial. When these interventions are made, the injustice of mass incarceration can be addressed successfully, and significant strides will be made in the fight against crime in the country.

References

Stevenson, B. (2012, March). *We need to talk about an Injustice* (Video File). Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/bryan_stevenson_we_need_to_talk_about_an_injustice?language=en