Mass Incarceration and Poverty

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U.S. State and Federal Prison Population, 1925-2013

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics Prisoners Series.
How does incarceration contribute to poverty?

- Removal of primary bread winners
- Increases the need for government assistance programs
- Potentially increase crime
How does incarceration contribute to poverty?

- The Scarlett Letter (F)
  - Cannot return to their jobs
  - Settling for a lower paying jobs
  - Unable to find employment altogether
How does incarceration contribute to poverty?

• The Scarlett Letter (F)
• Upon release ex-inmates especially those convicted for felony crimes find re-entry extremely difficult
Percentage of U.S. males likely to ever go to prison, based on constant 1991 rates of first incarceration, by age, race, and Hispanic origin

Cumulative percent of males incarcerated

- Black: 28.5%
- Hispanic: 16.0%
- All males: 9.0%
- White: 4.4%

Age at first admission

13 20 30 40 50 60 70 80
How does incarceration contribute to poverty?

One significant part of the relationship between poverty and incarceration is policies aimed at low-income individuals.
How does incarceration contribute to poverty?

- Decreased population effects
  - Legislation targets particular areas
  - These areas have experienced decreased populations within the last 60 years
  - Less People = Less Consumers = Less Businesses = Less Growth
Incarceration Cycle

- Recidivism rates are constantly increasing
- Children grow up seeing their parents repeatedly incarcerated and end up thinking that incarceration is common place
- Incarceration is repetitive and consolidated to particular demographic areas
Statistical Support

- Correlation between Poverty and Mass Incarceration
  - Poverty measurement doesn’t include institutionalized populations
  - In the past this was insignificant
  - Now with the massive prison growth this difference needs to be accounted for
Statistical Support

- The data used a sample time period:
- The overall incarceration rate rose by 319 people per 100,000 people.
- Other things being equal, the regression implies that the rise in incarceration contributed about 1 full percentage point \((0.000031 \times 319)\) to the poverty rate.
- That is, had the dramatic run-up in incarceration not occurred, the poverty rate would have fallen by about 1.3 percentage points, or more than 10%, other things being equal.
Moving forward

- Legislation is one of the main reasons that incarceration rates have grown so rapidly.
- It must also be the reason that incarceration declines.
- Prisons need more programs for men to acquire skills.
- The exploitation of prison labor must end.