

Sentencing Times

A publication of **The Sentencing Project**, Washington, D.C.

Fall 2013

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RESEARCH

Shift in Racial/Ethnic Incarceration Rates Among Women Reported

After decades of rising numbers, incarceration rates of African Americans in state and federal prison populations fell between 2000 and 2009, especially for women, according to a widely-quoted study, *The Changing Racial Dynamics of Women's Incarceration*, from The Sentencing Project. During the same decade, the rate of imprisonment for whites rose, as well as for Latinas.

The report was written by Marc Mauer, executive director of The Sentencing Project, who said that no single factor could explain the shifting rates. He cited as possible contributors changes in drug laws and sentencing patterns, decreasing arrest rates for blacks, the rising number of whites and Hispanics serving mandatory sentences for methamphetamine offenses and socioeconomic shifts that have disproportionately affected low-income white women.

The report's findings, based on data from the Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics, "mark a shift from what we've seen



for several decades now. Normally, these things don't change very dramatically over a one-decade period," Mauer told *The New York Times*.

As prison populations fluctuate, the relative rate of incarceration among racial groups may or may not reflect prevailing patterns, according to the report. But as the prospect of a declining prison population has become a distinct possibility for the next decade, it will become increasingly important to monitor whether reduced incarceration is experienced

Shift in Racial/Ethnic Incarceration Rates continued on page 3

POLICY

Attorney General Holder Calls for Mandatory Minimum Reform



U.S. Attorney General, Eric Holder, calls for end to mass incarceration.

U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder's call for major changes to the nation's criminal justice system with a call for a reduced use of mandatory minimum sentencing laws for low-level, nonviolent drug offenders was greeted with cautious optimism by The Sentencing Project.

Holder made the announcement in August at the American Bar Association convention in San Francisco, telling the audience: "We cannot simply prosecute or incarcerate our way to becoming a safer nation. Today, a vicious cycle of poverty, criminality and incarceration traps too many Americans and weakens too many communities. However, many aspects of our criminal justice system may actually exacerbate this problem, rather than alleviate it."

"We're cautiously optimistic," Marc Mauer, executive director of The Sentencing Project, told *Between the Lines* weekly radio show, "now that the openings for reform will become more substantial in the

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

A New Day for Sentencing Reform?

"It's clear... that too many Americans go to too many prisons for far too long, and for no truly good law enforcement reason."

Those were the words of Attorney General Eric Holder at the annual meeting of the American Bar Association in August. The speech caught me somewhat off guard. That morning I had returned to the office after a refreshing two-week vacation, planning to spend most of the day catching up with my staff and sorting through the crush of email messages.

So rather than a quiet day at the office, we had phone calls starting first thing that morning from media outlets both in this country and abroad wanting to know if this was indeed the sea change in the political environment that we'd been waiting for. I don't know yet if it is, but I can say that I'm more optimistic about this than I've been in a long time. Here's why.

First, our collective thanks to the Attorney General. While the problem of mass incarceration is gaining increasing traction in policy discussions, it has not yet reached critical mass among the general public. High profile attention to these developments will certainly help to bring us closer to that moment.

So, how should we assess the potential impact of this speech?

On a day-to-day level it remains to be seen how Holder's new charging policy for federal prosecutors will play out. Recognizing that only Congress can enact reforms to mandatory sentencing penalties, the Attorney General is calling on prosecutors to engage in an individualized assessment of the specifics of federal drug cases, and to use their discretion to avoid triggering mandatory sentences in cases where that would produce unjust outcomes. The new policy will certainly have some effect, but the degree of change is likely to vary a fair amount by jurisdiction, or even among individuals within a U.S. Attorney's office, and will depend partly on the type of guidance and oversight that is exercised.

The more substantial effect may very well be in relation to the political environment. As a criminal justice researcher, I strongly believe

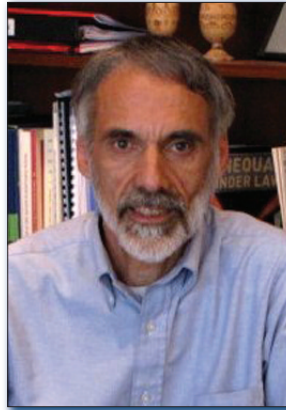
that we need to engage in fact-based analysis of public policy. But I also recognize that the failure of criminal justice policy in recent decades is not that we don't have sufficient research to guide public policy, but rather that we live in a political environment where policymakers have too often ignored research in developing policy.

So in this regard the Holder speech may help to produce a significant opening in that environment. Notably, there was almost universal acclaim for his talk, and certainly no backlash of the "tough on crime" variety that once would have been a virtual certainty. Political leaders and others pointed to the two

bipartisan sentencing reform bills introduced in the U.S. Senate that propose mandatory sentencing reforms. And several weeks after the Holder speech, whether coincidental or not, Newark mayor and Senate candidate Cory Booker unveiled a criminal justice reform platform as the centerpiece of his campaign.

It's also clear that a decade ago it would have been unlikely for an Attorney General to have delivered such a speech. Much has changed in recent years to lay the groundwork for a call for reform. Sustained advocacy in the areas of drug policy, excessive incarceration, racial justice, and other issues has contributed to a political environment where a growing swath of American society has become more critical of the problems brought about by mass incarceration. Along with that has come program development around alternatives to incarceration and reentry, a growing reconsideration of sentencing policies, and a search for public safety strategies that are less reliant on prisons as the primary means of addressing crime problems.

So Attorney General Holder's message both represents a recognition of the change that has taken place to date and provides the next steps forward in implementing change. Let's hope that he is successful in these initiatives, but let's also not forget that sustained change is ultimately only possible if we continue to build a strong movement for reform.



Marc Mauer, Executive Director

Shift in Racial/Ethnic Incarceration Rates continued from page 1

in similar ways across racial/ethnic groups.

The report is an initial look at whether this trend of decreasing prison populations is reflected in the numbers of minority women being incarcerated. Sections of the report cover: the slowing growth in incarceration; race and gender disparity in incarceration; and the changing racial composition of women's incarceration.

Among the report's key findings:

- Racial/ethnic disparities in U.S. incarceration remain substantial – In 2009, African Americans and Latinos constituted more than 60% of imprisoned offenders
- Declining rate of incarceration for African Americans – From 2000 to 2009 the rate of incarceration in state and federal prisons declined 9.8% for black men and 30.7% for black women.

- Dramatic shift in racial disparities among women – In 2000, black women were incarcerated at six times the rate of white women. By 2009 that ratio had declined by 53%, to 2.8:1. The disparity between Hispanic and non-Hispanic white women declined by 16.7% during this period.

The report received considerable media coverage, including *The New York Times*, *The Huffington Post*, and National Public Radio's "Tell Me More." *The Baltimore Sun* editorialized that "it's apparent that any benefit to society of filling the nation's prisons with hundreds of thousands of low-level nonviolent drug offenders is far outweighed by the damage to individual lives, families and communities."

Attorney General Holder continued from page 1

coming years. I say cautious because the scale of mass incarceration is so enormous that it won't make much difference if we're just tinkering around the edges and seeing relatively modest shifts. What we need is a wholesale reconsideration of sentencing policy and how we use the criminal justice system."

Since its establishment in 1986, The Sentencing Project has worked to reduce the nation's reliance on incarceration, and has long opposed mandatory minimum sentencing, which limits judicial sentencing discretion.

Over the years, The Sentencing Project has produced numerous publications on mandatory minimum sentencing as well as provided testimony about it before congressional committees, the U.S. Sentencing Commission, the American Bar Association and a broad range of meetings and conferences.

It is not surprising, then, that many media outlets turned to The Sentencing Project for reaction to Holder's plan. Mauer was interviewed on *Fox News*, *C-Span*, *BBC Radio* and quoted in *The Huffington Post*, the *Boston Globe* and *The Guardian*; Nicole Porter, director of advocacy for The Sentencing Project, was interviewed on *CBS radio*.

The impact of Holder's changes "could be significant," said Mauer, noting that many of the 25,000 drug convictions in federal court

each year are for lower-level offenses such as street level operatives.

Any decline in mandatory minimum sentencing, along with criminal justice reforms at the state level, may benefit communities of color in particular. Mandatory minimum sentences, in large part a product of the "war on drugs" begun

in the 1980s, exacerbated the racial disparity already extant in the prison population.

"The real value of Eric Holder's speech, though, may be in the political arena and the symbolism of the speech to have the attorney general of the U.S. actually saying it's time to end mass incarceration, it's been destructive in many ways and we need to take a different course. For far too long, I think the problem for criminal justice reform has not been that there's a lack of research on how to do things better, but a lack of political will on making that happen, and this could be a very bold step toward opening that up now," stated Mauer.



The Sentencing Project's Executive Director, Marc Mauer, and Richard Viguerie of Right on Crime on C-Span

Public Education

The Sentencing Project has made presentations to the following organizations and institutions in the past year:

- AFL-CIO, MLK Conference
- American Bar Association
- Racial Justice Project
- American Society of Criminology
- Applied Research Center
- Facing Race Conference
- Center for American Progress
- Columbia University
- School of Public Health
- Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparity in the Criminal Justice System (Connecticut)
- Disproportionate Minority Contact Conference, Virginia Department of Criminal Services
- Faulkner University
- Jones School of Law, Alabama
- Federal Bar Association of Utah
- Murphy Institute at City University of New York
- National Academy of Sciences Panel on Incarceration and Health
- National Alliance of Faith and Justice, 2013
- March on Washington
- National Association of Sentencing Advocates and Mitigation Specialists

Public Education continued on page 4

U.S. Supreme Court Imposes Limits on Mandatory Sentencing

In a 5-4 decision in June in *Alleyne v. United States*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that certain facts must be proved to a jury beyond a reasonable doubt in order to impose a mandatory minimum sentence.

The case focused on whether facts that could lead to a mandatory minimum sentence must be charged in an indictment and proved to a jury. The Court ruled that the Sixth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution required this rigorous burden of proof.

The ruling cleared up an ambiguous area of federal sentencing law that had allowed a judge to increase the mandatory minimum sentence for robbery from five years to seven years for defendant Allen Alleyne because a firearm was allegedly "brandished." The high court determined that the question of brandishing should have been determined by a jury beyond a reasonable doubt.



Marc Mauer said the high court's decision marked "a victory for thousands of individuals and their families – disproportionately from communities of color – whose lives are put on

hold each year by unjust mandatory minimum sentences. Research shows that mandatory minimums contribute significantly to racial disparities in punishment. By requiring a higher burden of proof in order to impose such sentences, the Court has taken an important step toward diminishing a primary driver of high prison populations, increasing prison costs, and racial unfairness in the criminal justice system."

The Sentencing Project submitted an amicus brief with the ACLU in support of the proposition that drug quantity must be proved to a jury beyond a reasonable doubt in order to impose a mandatory minimum punishment.

Public Education continued from page 3

- National Black Law Students Association, Mid-Atlantic Region
- Northern Virginia Ethical Society
- Ohio Justice and Policy Center
- PEN World Voices Festival
- Philadelphia Fight
- Princeton University Public Policy Action Institute
- Rainbow PUSH
- Rutgers University
- The Catholic University Law Review's 2013 Symposium
- University of Miami Law School
- University of Michigan School of Public Health
- University of Texas Law School
- Urban Institute

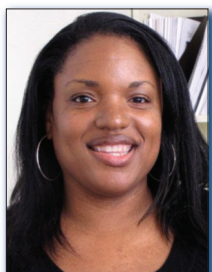
STATE POLICY

Reform at the State Level

The Sentencing Project continued to help activists, advocates and state legislators promote criminal justice reform by supporting and providing data, hosting webinars and conferences, and contributing technical assistance and the research that promotes reform. Noteworthy state successes supported by The Sentencing Project's work, include:

Delaware

Background data from a report from The Sentencing Project, *Expanding the Vote: State Felony Disenfranchisement Reform, 1997-2010*, written by Nicole Porter, advocacy director of The Sentencing Project, helped passage of a Delaware law that eliminated the five-year waiting period imposed on



Nicole Porter, director of advocacy, The Sentencing Project

voting rights restoration for most individuals.



State Senator, Chip Shields

Oregon

The Sentencing Project's ongoing work to encourage states to adopt racial impact statement legislation led to Oregon becoming the third state in the nation to require such statements in consideration of proposed state criminal laws or sentencing codes. The legislation was sponsored by State Senator Chip Shields who led the campaign over a number of years. Iowa and Connecticut had adopted such policies in 2008. Iowa legislators were prompted to do so after the state was identified as the leader of racial disparity in incarceration in a report of The Sentencing Project.

Your Support Makes A Difference

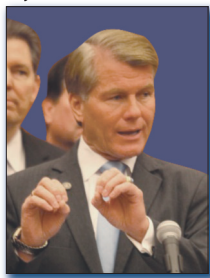
Support our efforts to promote fair and effective criminal justice policies and alternatives to incarceration by sending a contribution today.

Contribute online at www.sentencingproject.org, or send a check to: The Sentencing Project, 1705 DeSales St., NW, 8th Floor, Washington, DC 20036

Make a long-term investment in sentencing reform

For information about how you can make a bequest or a stock gift to The Sentencing Project, please contact Marc Levin at (202) 628-0871.

Reform at the State Level continued on page 5



Governor
Bob McDonnell

Virginia

Gov. Bob McDonnell announced the automatic restoration of voting rights for persons convicted of nonviolent offenses who meet certain criteria. A report by The Sentencing Project, *State-Level Estimates of Felon Disenfranchisement in the United States, 2010*, showed that in three states – Florida, Kentucky and Virginia – more than one in five African-Americans had lost the right to vote

due to a felony conviction.

“For those who have fully paid their debt for their crimes, they deserve a second chance to fully rejoin society and exercise their civil and constitutional rights,” stated McDonnell, a former prosecutor, who noted that disenfranchisement, along with other hurdles, made it harder for former offenders to successfully transition to life outside of prison.

McDonnell’s action could restore voting rights to as many as 100,000 persons convicted of nonviolent felonies who have completed their terms.

RESEARCH REPORTS

New Publications from The Sentencing Project

Major Reports

The Sentencing Project completed a new report in our series on life-sentenced prisoners, *Life Goes On: The Historic Rise of Life Sentences in America*. Our analysis finds that despite a substantial, long-term drop in serious crime and modest declines in prison populations, the number of prisoners with life sentences continues to rise, now reaching nearly 160,000 nationally. Of these, 49,000 people are serving life without parole, a 22.2% rise since 2008 and a nearly 300% rise since 1984. The report finds that one of every nine people in prison is serving a life sentence. Life sentences are also not restricted to the “worst of the worst.” About 10,000 lifers have been convicted of nonviolent offenses, including 2,500 for a drug offense and 5,400 for a property offense. The report also finds that nearly half of all lifers are African American and one-sixth Latino.

With the U.S. prison population on the decline, *International Growth Trends in Prison Privatization*, a report authored by Cody Mason, indicates that U.S. private prison companies are seeking new markets abroad. Despite evidence that the U.S.-led model of prison privatization is not cost-efficient and often provides inadequate services, international use of private prisons continues, especially in English-speaking countries. This interest, according to the report, “has helped private U.S. prison companies diversify their investments at a time when America’s prison population growth has stalled.” In response

to the report, *Time* magazine noted “Crime, incarceration and prison occupancy rates are dropping in the United States, and that’s great news for everyone – except private prison operators.”

On the Chopping Block 2012: State Prison Closings, authored by Nicole Porter, documents a continuing trend of states to downsize or close their prisons – reducing prison capacity by 28,000 since 2011. States planning to close prisons in 2013 included California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, and Louisiana. Reforms in sentencing and parole policies have resulted in less demand for prison space in addition to states working to balance budget priorities.

Also authored by Nicole Porter, *The State of Sentencing 2012*, highlights reforms in 24 states that illustrate a continued trend to reform sentencing policies and scale back the use of imprisonment without compromising public safety. The report provides an overview of recent policy reforms in the areas of sentencing, probation and parole, collateral consequences, and juvenile justice.

In *Ending Mass Incarceration: Charting a New Justice Reinvestment*, The Sentencing Project and colleagues in the field trace the history and examine the impact of the Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI). Justice Reinvestment was conceived as part of the solution to mass incarceration. The intent was to reduce corrections populations and budgets, thereby generating savings for reinvestment in high incarceration communities to make them

safer, stronger, more prosperous, and equitable. The report concludes that though JRI has advanced criminal justice reform, it has failed to make significant reductions in the correctional populations of most of the states in which it is operative. The report examines why this is the case and how the original goals of JRI of reducing corrections populations and investing in local communities can be achieved in the future.

The Sentencing Project collaborated with First Focus, an organization that works on prioritizing children and families in federal policy and budget decisions, to publish *Children in Harm’s Way: Criminal Justice, Immigration Enforcement, and Child Welfare*. The report documents the historic high levels of people being held in immigration detention centers and the impact on their children, noting that stepped-up immigration enforcement raises the same questions as those asked 20 years ago about children whose parents were being sent to jails and prisons in record numbers.

Briefing papers and fact sheets

The Facts about Dangers of Added Police in Schools states that “research to date has demonstrated that it is counterproductive for public safety goals to add more police to schools,” after noting that “Most schools continue to be extraordinarily safe places for children.” In order to reduce violence and promote educational objectives, the report states “it is far more effective to provide the nation’s children with the

necessary resources to support their emotional, mental, and scholastic development through strong school environments.”

The dramatic growth of the U.S. prison population in the last 40 years has led to record levels of disenfranchisement, with an estimated 5.85 million citizens banned from the polls today. *Felony Disenfranchisement: A Primer*, authored by Jean Chung, program associate at The Sentencing Project, provides an introduction to the issue.

Parents in State Prisons notes that the parents of one in every 50 children in the United States are in prison. Imprisoning parents for non-violent offenses may be a costly way of holding parents accountable for their misconduct, according to the report. States, it notes, incur “additional expenses for mental health, child welfare, medical, and economic services for incarcerated parents’ children, who use these services at higher rates than do other children.”

The Science of Downsizing Prisons... What works? provides a blueprint for reducing incarceration while maintaining public safety, noting that relatively modest changes in current criminal justice practices can have “a cumulative effect on state prison populations.” Among the recommendations: Expand alternatives to incarceration, reduce length of stay for sentenced prisoners and divert technical parole and probation violators from prison and reduce their length of stay.

50 Years Later, The Work Continues

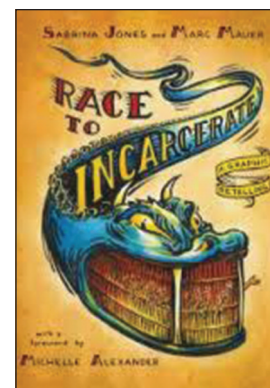
The 50th anniversary of the March on Washington brought five days of exhibits, seminars, civil-rights documentaries, and two commemorative marches, to the nation's capital. Civil rights progress has been made, but many events emphasized the work that still needs to be done.

Marc Mauer, executive director of The

Sentencing Project, talked about racial disparity in incarceration as a result of the chilling explosion in the prison population. Mauer was a plenary speaker at the National Alliance of Faith and Justice’s 2013 “March on Washington Memorial Youth Mentoring Summit.”

Copies of his book, *Race to Incarcerate: A Graphic Retelling*, supported by the Open Society Foundations and published earlier this year, were distributed to the young audience. The comic book form

of Mauer’s book, co-authored with graphic artist Sabrina Jones, brought home visually disproportionate impact of the growth of incarceration on communities of color.



POLICY

Federal Update: Reform Momentum Takes Hold in Washington

In recent years, legislatures around the country have taken steps to address overcrowding and racial disparities in the criminal justice system. As reforms have taken hold, we have begun to see modest declines in prison populations and even reduced racial disparities in some areas. Encouraging as these developments have been, however, much of the progress has been limited to state and local jurisdictions. Indeed, recent data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics shows that the federal prison system continues to grow.

That may be about to change.

Last fall, we noted a number of quiet but important developments that offered hope for progress at the federal policy level. Those hopes brightened this year as Republicans and Democrats in both the House and Senate put forward measures that would potentially reduce federal

prison populations and racial disparities while maintaining public safety.

This summer, House appropriators included money in the annual Justice Department spending bill to create a bipartisan task force to consider ways to reduce overcrowding and improve outcomes in the federal prison system. Named in honor of the late Chuck Colson, the panel would examine the causes of overcrowding and work to promote programs and policies that reduce recidivism. The Sentencing Project has played a leading role in encouraging and promoting such efforts, and we are hopeful that the Colson Task Force could lead to significant reform at the federal level.

In addition, Senators Dick Durbin and Mike Lee introduced the Smarter Sentencing Act, which takes two significant steps forward on sentencing reform. First, it

reduces overly harsh penalties for drug offenses and allows judges greater flexibility in sentencing. Second, it extends the more equitable crack cocaine provisions of the Fair Sentencing Act retroactively to individuals serving prison terms under the now discredited 100-to-1 sentencing disparity. While this legislation would not eliminate mandatory minimums altogether, by reducing penalties and restoring discretion to judges it would help to mitigate their harshest effects. The bill continues the work begun by the Fair Sentencing Act to reduce the disparity in sentences for crack and powder cocaine offenses – a disparity that has had a devastating impact on African American communities. The Sentencing Project has worked closely with the Senate to develop and help promote this legislation, which could be taken up as early as this fall.

State Advocacy Convening



David Liners and Robin Johnson participated in the state advocacy convening.

Sharing information about successful grassroots strategies is something state advocates repeatedly say they could use more of.

Responding to that need, The Sentencing Project held its first State Advocacy Convening in August with 21 participants, including state-based advocates, formerly incarcerated activists and faith-based leaders from around the nation. The program gave the various stakeholders an opportunity to discuss and share information on successful campaigns, talk about the environment for short-and long-term criminal justice policy reform, and discussed the relative merits of arguments based on cost-effectiveness versus moral and human arguments.

Marc Mauer provided an overview of

the criminal justice landscape, discussing policies for reducing mass incarceration and racial disparity. Nicole Porter discussed recent successes in criminal justice reforms. And Ashley Nellis gave a preview of her current research – the marked increase in persons serving life sentences in a period of overall decline in the prison population.

“I’ve gotten a lot out of this convening,” said David Liners, state director of WISDOM, an organization in Wisconsin that works for justice and the common good. WISDOM includes 140 congregations in 17 religious denominations from 10 regions of the state.

“I knew very little about criminal justice, when I first started in this field 12 years ago,” said Liners, who became involved in criminal justice through neighborhood safety issues. “It just evolved until I realized there was a systemic problem and the whole criminal justice system needed to be overhauled.”

Another participant in the convening,

Robin Johnson, said: “If you had more convenings, you’d build a big army of advocates across the nation.”

Johnson got involved in criminal justice because her older brother got “a 465 year sentence” 20 years ago. “I was totally unaware of the criminal justice system before. I was just like an everyday person – they know there are prisons but they don’t know anything about them.”

Johnson is a member of the Kansas City Criminal Justice Task Force, a group made up of formerly incarcerated citizens, family members of incarcerated people, and lawyers, which is pushing a bill that would allow Missouri lifers, imprisoned for 15 years and who meet certain criteria, a review and a chance to gain a parole hearing.

The convening, she said, helped her understand the importance of talking to the legislative opponents of criminal justice reform. “It expanded and increased my awareness, made me want to jump on all the criminal justice bandwagons.”

MEDIA:

The Sentencing Project in the News



July 30, 2013

What’s Behind Falling Incarceration Rates?

More than 1.5 million Americans were in state and federal prisons last year, according to the latest numbers from the Department of Justice. But new statistics show the number of people in incarcerated in the U.S. continues to fall.

Nicole Porter is the Director of Advocacy for The Sentencing Project, a group that’s been working to lower the incarceration rate for some time now.

PORTER: We’ve been documenting changes in policy and practice for about 10 years and would say that the trend started about 12 years ago. We’re only now starting to realize the decline in the prison population and in the rate of incarceration because

people are sentenced to very long penalties, so the changes in policy and practice have taken a while to actually be seen in state prison population.

The New York Times

December 1, 2012

Sunday Dialogue: How We Punish Crime By Marc Mauer

As one who has long advocated for the expansion of alternatives to incarceration, I could not agree more with Mr. Corwin that we need to divert low-risk offenders to community-based supervision and services. But if we really hope to reverse America’s world-record prison growth, and its exorbitant costs, we need to examine the extreme sentencing policies that apply to serious offenders as well.

Currently, an estimated 140,000 people in prison – 1 of every 11 behind

bars – are serving life sentences. In addition, substantial numbers are serving “life equivalent” sentences of 30, 40 and 50 years, with little possibility of parole.

Most of these people have been convicted of serious crimes, but excessively lengthy prison terms preclude the possibility of individual change. The 18-year-old who is the getaway driver for a friend’s armed robbery of a drugstore will not necessarily be a threat to public safety 10 years later, yet will often be turned down by a parole board owing to the nature of the crime.

The Washington Post

June 23, 2013

Farm Bill died for many reasons, including attack on felons

In a letter to the editor, **Jeremy Haile, federal advocacy counsel for The**

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THE SENTENCING PROJECT

Established in 1986, The Sentencing Project works for a fair and effective U.S. criminal justice system by promoting reforms in sentencing policy, addressing unjust racial disparities and practices, and advocating for alternatives to incarceration.

To these ends, it seeks to recast the public debate on crime and punishment.

To receive news and updates from The Sentencing Project electronically, send an email to: staff@sentencingproject.org

Media continued from page 7

Sentencing Project, wrote "It seems the defeat of the House farm bill has a thousand fathers. But one reason for the bill's demise has been overlooked: a particularly mean-spirited amendment that would have denied food stamps to anyone ever convicted of certain violent offenses. The amendment would have extended the existing ban that applies to those with felony drug convictions and would mean that parents released from prison could lose food assistance for their families.

Rep. Collin Peterson, the senior Democratic member on the House Agriculture Committee, said he lost votes from members who were angered by this amendment, which would place yet another hurdle before the tens of thousands of incarcerated individuals who struggle each year to reenter society.



April 26, 2013

How the Prison-Industrial Complex Destroys Lives

Marc Mauer is the executive director

of The Sentencing Project, and the author of "Race to Incarcerate," which has just been released in graphic format, illustrated by Sabrina Jones, as "Race to Incarcerate: A Graphic Retelling" (The New Press).

Mark Karlin: In praising your original book "Race to Incarcerate," Julian Bond states that prisoners have become commodities in the United States. In what ways?

Marc Mauer: The question of whether persons convicted of a crime should be imprisoned or not is now increasingly influenced by economic interests. While prisons have long tended to be located in rural communities because of the availability of cheap land, this trend has accelerated in recent decades as a result of lobbying by rural officials. With declining economic prospects in many of these communities, many local leaders have come to view prisons as their best hope of economic opportunity through the jobs that are generated. In practice, this has not proven to be beneficial to these areas, but nonetheless rural legislators continue to seek such opportunities. Perhaps not coincidentally, many of these officials are also strong supporters of harsh sentencing policies.

THE HUFFINGTON POST

May 28, 2013

The Missing Black Voters

By Marc Mauer and Christopher Uggen
A new Census Bureau report highlights a significant milestone in electoral participation, finding that in the 2012 election African Americans voted at a higher rate than whites for the first time. The two point black margin of 66 percent vs. 64 percent represents a sharp shift from the nearly 8 point white margin in 1996. While this shift in turnout is intriguing, it actually downplays the scale of change.

Unaccounted in the Census Bureau estimates are the 5.8 million adults who are ineligible to vote due to a current or previous felony conviction... Racial disparities in the criminal justice system translate into much higher rates of disenfranchisement for African Americans relative to other groups. Factoring these uncounted lost voters in to the black population produces a turnout figure up to 72 percent of the eligible adult population.