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## Social Inequality Influenced the Way Imprisonment In The United States

Is it possible for poor communities in the United States to achieve public safety and fair criminal justice with the presence of incarceration, the penal system, and other policies that spread social inequality? According to the feature article, entitled "Beyond Crime and Punishment: Prisons and Inequality" by the authors named Bruce Western and Becky Pettit, the decade of the 1970s gave strike to new changes in government policy on crime and punishment that led to a gradual decline in crime rates throughout the American society, but ironically stricter law enforcement caused the imprisoned population to grow rapidly. The growth of the penal system since the 1990s has been affecting social inequality nationwide through the prison boom among disadvantaged men with low educational background and poor economic conditions for ex-inmates in the United States.

The divisions of race and class arise when prisoners return to society and experience financial instability and low wages. Although imprisonment policies had a minor impact on social inequality during most of the 20th century, the prison population increased massively, due to multiple factors, including incarcerations, racial identity, crime, low educational background, and poverty. The expansion of the penal system have imprisoned many poor minority men, exceeding their arrest rates, who had to undergo confinement. Compared to the historical time period 1925-1970, the recent rate of incarceration grew five times more, and as a result the United States became known to the world for having the highest incarceration rate. Certain statistics in this article demonstrate how the rate of imprisonment increased among black men who dropped out of high school during the end of the 1990s, ranging from 41% for black males aged 22-30 to 59% for black males aged 30-34. The racial discrepancy occurs, as statistics show the great differences between the employment percentages of high school dropouts among young blacks and white men; the wage gap between the two racial groups of males; higher rate of incarceration among blacks more than whites; and other disparities.

Reflecting on the textbook source (Chapter 7.3- page 147), a high rate of incarceration has been recorded in the United States within the last hundred years, and the largest population of prisoners throughout the world (25%) are found to be inmates behind the bars in the United States. However, why did the 21st century mark the highest record of imprisonment in our nation's history, while the American population contributes a minor part (5%) of the global community? Well, former prisoners, especially black male high school dropouts, struggle for employment and lose public assistance; And, dramatically, the American criminal justice system is very tough in its policies for young male dropouts because the socially margin men seem to have the highest probability to commit crimes and be arrested for them. Also, the drug war has been a social issue that affected the incarceration rate to increase rapidly and racial disparity between the African American men and white males to rise because the blacks had higher arrest rates than white men for their excessive drug distribution and possession that indicated higher criminal behavior, despite racial bias. Individuals who were once convicted of any sort of crime in their lives- ex-convicts- are not publically welcomed or accepted anymore, after they return to their communities from jail or prison, because the society neglects them from economic advantages and/or any other public/social benefits. It is surprising how imprisonment affects availability of job opportunities for these convicted suspects; not only 10-30% of wages are

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reduced, but also when the ex-convicts grow old, it is often really difficult for them to get jobs with seniority pay and other advantages, and instead they are highly expected to work in day labor and other institutions.

However, the imprisonment population has extraordinarily increased throughout the United States that never happened before in American history. According to national statistics, imprisonment deepened the racial inequality between social groups and the wage gap between black and white male high school dropouts. Even though the crime rate has dropped throughout American society, the new policies toward crime and punishment and the growth of the penal system have led to the expansion of imprisonment that has been harming the lives of poor minorities more than the wealthy upper-class people in the community. In order to favor the privileged ones in society with their fundamental rights, the American criminal justice system relies on the unequal conduct of policies based on racial and class differences, producing social inequality. Therefore, the government has to be aware and pay attention of the public safety for the poor convicts in minor, disadvantaged areas.

In conclusion, the future can be inferred to be harder for the poor living in the United States because punishments for them may exceed the tolerance of criminal behavior in society, and the high records of imprisonment could ruin the reputations of those lower-leveled neighborhoods. The prison boom is implanted in the structure of the American social inequality, resulting in unemployment and other public instabilities, but gains in public safety can positively impact the American criminal justice system.