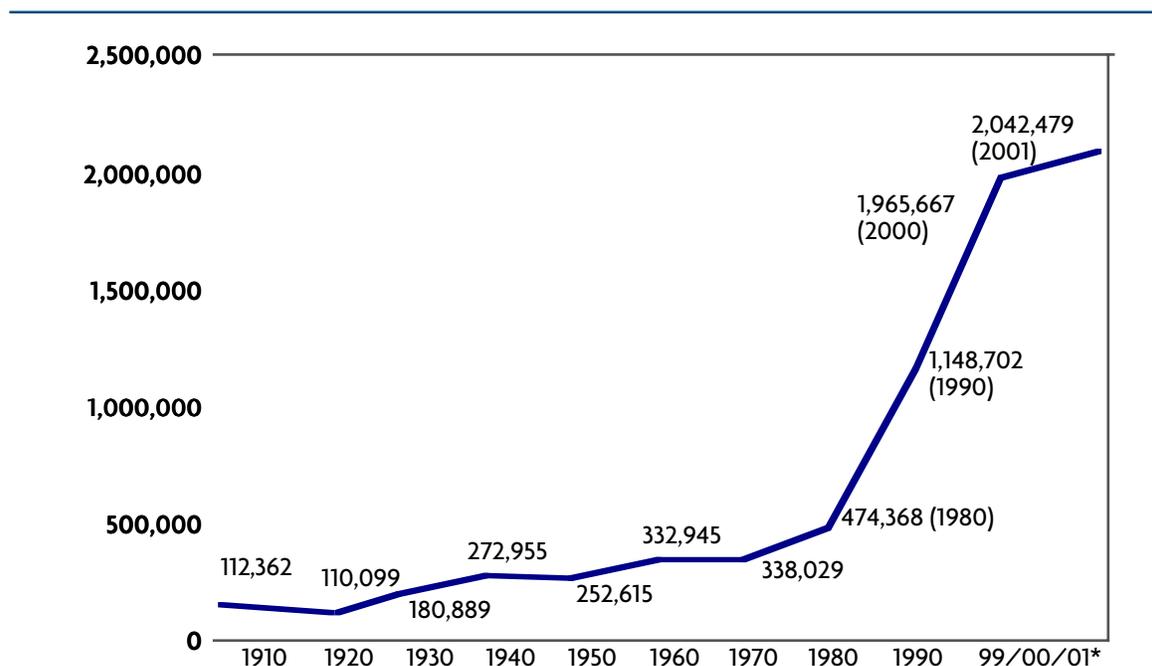


## The Punishing Decade: Prison and Jail Estimates at the Millennium

As the century draws to a close, we can safely predict that America will end the 1990s by having put more people behind bars than in any other decade in our history. Throughout most of the century prior to 1980, the incarceration rate, and the raw number of people behind bars, has risen and fallen with wars, depressions, economic booms and busts, as well as with the rise and fall of the crime rate. But as the following charts illustrate, the last thirty years, and particularly, the last decade have witnessed the kind of huge jumps in prison commitments that bear no historical comparison.<sup>1</sup> As the doors to new cellblocks opened, the number of prisoners and jail inmates soared, in good times and bad times, independent of whether the crime rate rose or fell. As this analysis by the Washington, D.C.-based Justice Policy Institute (JPI) shows, some time in 2001 America will have two million adult citizens in prison and jail.

**Graph 1 - The Punishing Decade:  
Number of Prison and Jail Inmates, 1910-2000**

*The 1990s and 1980s dwarf all other decades in prison growth*

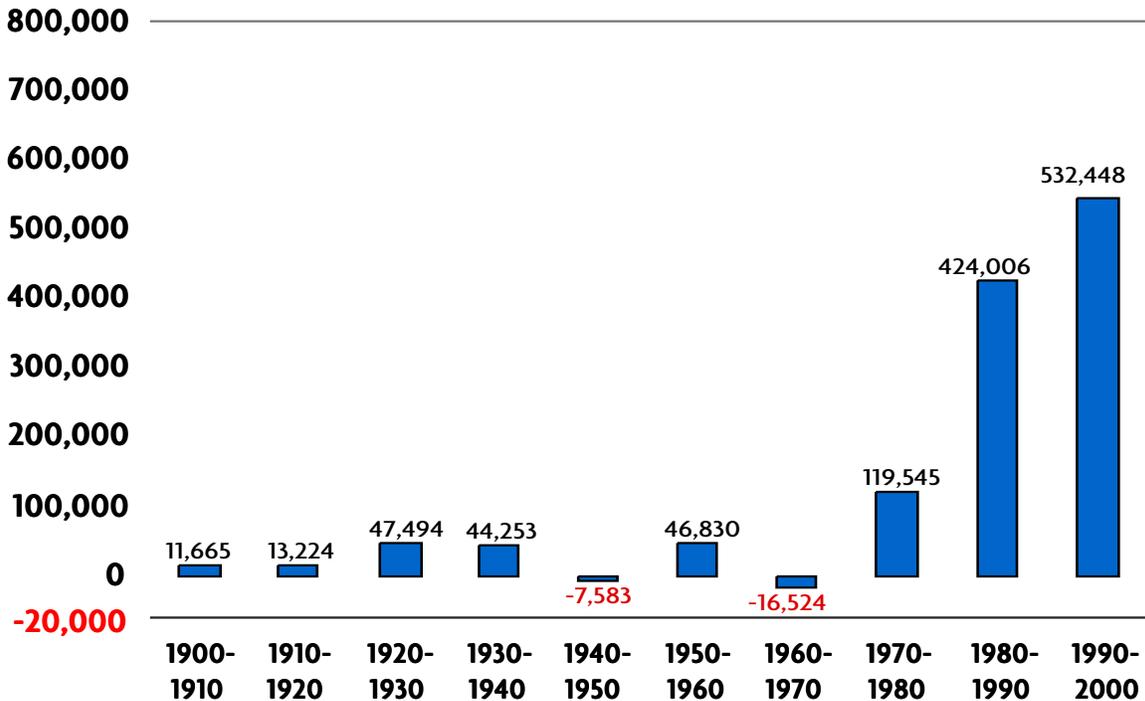


Source: Justice Policy Institute analysis of U.S. Department of Justice Data.

\*1999, 2000 and 2001 are Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates of what could be the year end totals

## Graph 2: Change in Prison Population Each Decade, 1910-2000

*Though some decades saw prison population drops, the 1990s increase was 16 times the average of previous decade gains this century*



Source: Justice Policy Institute analysis of U.S. Department of Justice Data

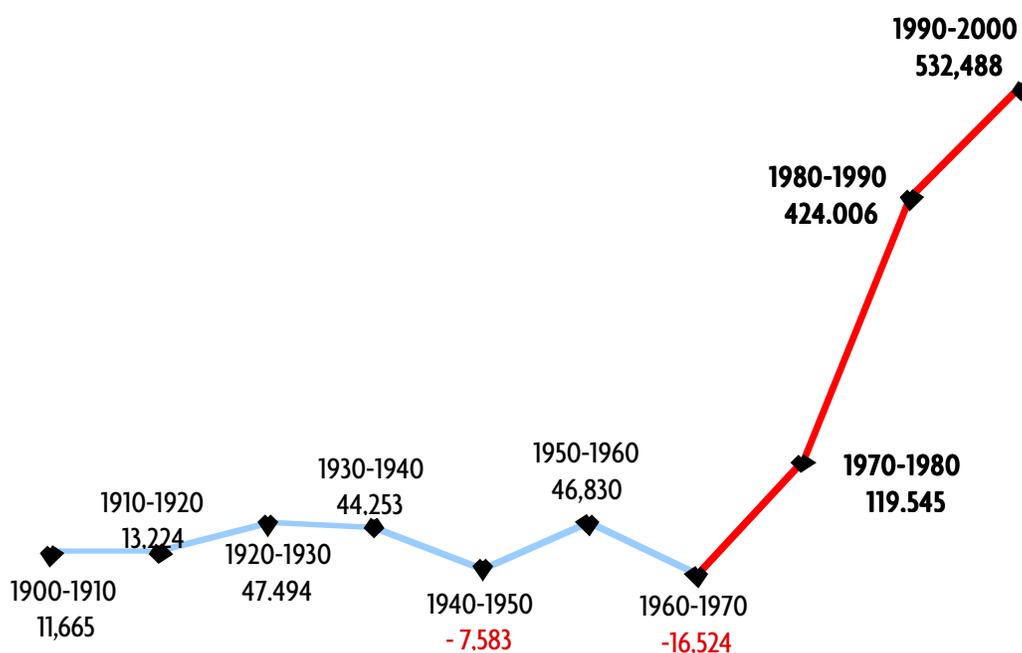
### 1. Two Million in 2001

The 1990s will end up being the most punishing decade on record in American History. By year end 1999, far more prisoners will have been added to America's prisons and jails than in any decade in recorded history. The 532,448 prisoners added to America's institutions during the 1990s is 25% higher than the number of prisoners added during the 1980s, and is nearly 16 times as many as the average number added during the five decades before 1970 in which the incarcerated population increased. Our incarceration rate plays such a distorting role in the labor market, one study found that the U.S. unemployment rate would be 2% higher if prisoners and jail inmates were counted.<sup>2</sup> Based on the most recent Bureau of Justice Statistic counts of state and federal prisoners and jail populations:

- On December 31, 1999, there could have been 1,892,074<sup>3</sup> adults behind bars in America;<sup>4</sup>
- By the end of this year, JPI estimates there will be 1,169,118 non-violent offenders in American jails and prisons. The Justice Policy Institute estimated last March that for the first time there were more than one million non-violent offenders behind bars;<sup>5</sup>
- Given one estimate of growth rates, the number of Americans incarcerated could reach 2,042,479 by the end of 2001.<sup>6</sup>
- The U.S., which has 5% of the world population, will have quarter of its prisoners in the year 2000. (about 2 million of the world's total of 8 million)<sup>7</sup>
- Adding juvenile offenders and undocumented persons to America's adult incarcerated population, the U.S. may already have more than 2 million persons behind bars.<sup>8</sup>

### Graph 3: Change in Prison Population, 1900-2000

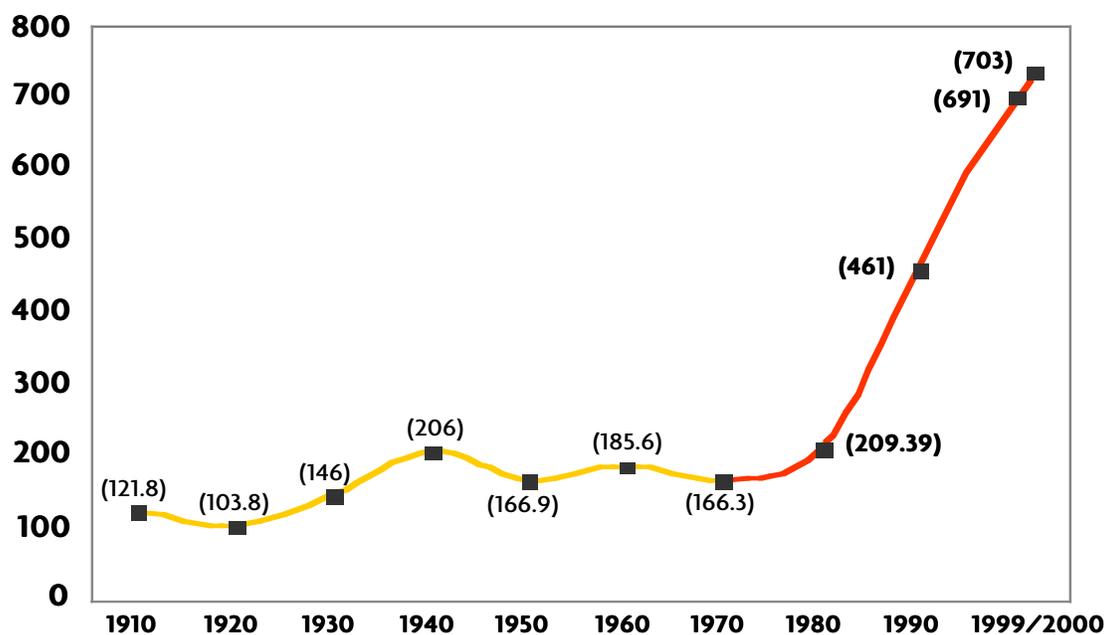
*The number of prison and jail inmates soared, in good times and bad times, independent of the crime rate*



Source: Justice Policy Institute analysis of U.S. Department of Justice Data

## Graph 4: Change in Incarceration Rate, 1910-2000

*America's incarceration rate is nearly 7 times what it was at the beginning of the century, and is three times what it was in 1980*



Source: Justice Policy Institute analysis of Bureau of the Census and Bureau of Justice Statistics Data

## 2. The Correlation Between Crime Rates and Imprisonment Policies

The connection between incarceration and crime rates appears as elusive at the end of the 90s as it has been in previous decades. There is little correlation between states with skyrocketing incarceration rates and the recent crime declines witnessed across the country. The “New York Miracle” - the sharp drops in homicides and violent crime rates experienced by America’s largest city between 1992 and 1997 - have occurred at the same time that New York State had the second slowest growing prison system in the country, and at a time when the city’s jail system downsized.<sup>9</sup>

New York’s modest prison growth provides a solid contrast to the explosive use of incarceration in other states. During the same 1992-97 period, California’s prison population grew by 30%, or about 270 inmates per week, compared to New York State’s more modest 30 inmates a week. Between 1992 and 1997, New York State’s violent crime rate fell by 38.6%, and its murder rate by 54.5%. By contrast, California’s violent crime rate fell by a more modest 23%, and its murder rate fell by 28%.<sup>10</sup> Put another way, New York experienced a percentage drop in homicides which was half again as great as the percentage drop in California’s homicide rate, despite the fact that California added 9 times as many inmates per week to its prisons as New York.

### **3. *The Race to Incarcerate***<sup>11</sup>

As has been well documented by Marc Mauer, assistant director of the Washington, DC-based Sentencing Project, America's incarceration policies have disproportionately impacted minorities, particularly African Americans. In 1997, even though African Americans made up only 13% of the population, half of the 1.2 million state and federal prisoners were African American (548,900).<sup>12</sup> African Americans are imprisoned at 6.6 times the rate of whites (3,253 vs. 491 per 100,000). The nation's imprisonment policies have had their greatest impact among young black men, resulting in alarming rates of incarceration and disenfranchisement:

- One in three black men between the ages of 20 and 29 were under some form of criminal justice control (in prison, jail, parole or probation) in 1995.<sup>13</sup> Other studies have shown that half the young men in Washington, DC, and more than half of the young men in Baltimore are under criminal justice control;<sup>14</sup>
- A black male born in 1991 stood a 29% chance of being imprisoned at some point in his life, compared to 4 percent for a white male born that year;<sup>15</sup>
- 1.4 million African American men, or 13 percent of the black adult male population have lost the right to vote due to their involvement in the criminal justice system. In the states with the most restrictive voting laws, 40 percent of African American men are likely to be permanently disenfranchised.<sup>16</sup>

### **4. *The Cost of Corrections***

The human costs of incarceration are matched by the financial drain America's imprisonment policies are having on state and federal budgets. Based on the conservative estimate that the 1997 average annual cost continues to hold true, the Justice Policy Institute estimates the following expenditures associated with our incarceration policy:

- The total cost of incarcerating Americans in state and federal prisons and jails in 1999 was \$38.17 billion,<sup>17</sup> and will approach \$40 billion in the year 2000;<sup>18</sup>
- It will cost Americans \$23.74 billion to imprison 1.2 million non-violent offenders in the year 2000.

The Justice Policy Institute has previously reported and quantified the staggering costs of imprisoning millions of Americans. The more significant findings include:

- America spends 50% more incarcerating 1.2 million non-violent offenders than the entire \$16.6 billion the federal government is currently spending on welfare programs that serve 8.5 million people;<sup>19</sup>
- The nation is spending 6 times more to incarcerate 1.2 million nonviolent offenders than the federal government spent on child care for 1.25 million children;<sup>20</sup>
- States around the country spent more building prisons than colleges in 1995 for the first time. There was nearly a dollar-for-dollar tradeoff between corrections and higher education, with university construction funds decreasing by \$945 million (to \$2.5 billion) while corrections funding increased by \$926 million (to \$2.6 billion).<sup>21</sup> During the 1990s, New York State's prison budget grew by \$761 million, while its budget for higher education dropped by \$615 million.<sup>22</sup> From 1984 to 1994, California's prison system realized a 209% increase in funding, compared to a 15% increase in state university funding.<sup>23</sup>

## 5. *Endnotes*

- 1 Methodology: The data used to develop the four graphs in this fact sheet were culled from a number of different sources, all of which are cited here, or in later endnotes. The prison numbers from 1925 through 1997 were taken from Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics, 1997 (1999), as were the jail estimates for 1983 through 1997. The 1998 and 1999 prison and jail estimates were taken from the most recent Bureau of Justice Statistics sources denoted below. Jail estimates for the years 1950 and 1960 were taken from Statistical Abstracts of the US (1950) (1960) Washington, DC: Bureau of the Census. All other pre-1950 sources were taken from Historical Corrections Statistics in the United States, 1850-1984 (1986). Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics. Data for 1923 was used for 1920. Jail data for 1972 was used for 1970, and jail data for 1978 was used for 1980.
- 2 Beckett, Katherine and Bruce Western. (1997) *How Unregulated is the U.S. Labor Market?: The Penal System as a Labor Market Institution*. Toronto: 1997 American Sociological Association Confernece.
- 3 Methodology: All estimates derived from assumption three of the Bureau of Justice Statistics latest report. Beck, Allen J. *Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 1999*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Schiraldi, Vincent and Ziedenberg, Jason (1999) *America's One Million Non-Violent Prisoners*. Washington, DC: The Justice Policy Institute.
- 6 Beck, Allen J. *Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 1999, 2000*.
- 7 The British Home Office estimates the world prison population to be at 8 million this year. Walmsley, Roy. (1999) *World Prison Population List: Research Findings No. 88*. London, United Kingdom: Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate.

- 8 Slevin, Peter. "Growth in Prison Population Slows." *The Washington Post*, April 20, 2000.
- 9 Methodology and numbers. New York City's average daily jail count was 21,448 in 1992 and 19,205 in 1997, and the New York State Department of Corrections year end count in 1992 was 61,736, and 70,026 in 1997. California's prison population was 109,496 in 1992, and 157,547 in 1997. *Average Daily Inmate Populations, FY 1989-1997*. (1998) New York: New York City Department of Corrections.; Maguire, Kathleen and Pastore, Ann L. Pastore. (1999) *Source Book of Criminal Justice Statistics, 1997*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- 10 Methodology: Changes in the state crime rates taken from: *Crime in the United States: Uniform Crime Reports (1993)* (1998). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation.
- 11 Mauer, Marc. *Race to Incarcerate*. New York, New York: The New Press.
- 12 Beck, *Prisoners in 1998*.
- 13 Mauer, Marc (1995) *Young Black Americans and the Criminal Justice System: Five Years Later*. Washington, DC: The Sentencing Project.
- 14 Miller, Jerome G. (1992) *Hobbling a Generation: Young African-American Males in the Criminal Justice System of America's Cities*: Baltimore, Maryland. Alexandria, Va: National Center on Institutions and Alternatives.; Lotke, Eric (1997) *Hobbling a Generation: Five Years Later*. Alexandria, Va: National Center on Institution and Alternatives.
- 15 Beck, Allen J. and Bonczar, Thomas P. (1997) *Lifetime Likelihood of Going to State or Federal Prison*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- 16 Fellner, Jamie and Mauer, Marc. (199) *Losing the Vote: The Impact of Felony Disenfranchisement Laws in the United States*. Washington, DC: The Sentencing Project and Human Rights Watch.
- 17 Methodology: The 1997 average annual costs of incarcerating a federal (\$23,476.80) and state (\$19,801.25) inmate, as well as jail inmates (\$20,224.65) were applied to the 1999 and 2000 estimates. The 1997 costs are the latest year's available data.
- 18 Camp, Camille Graham and Camp, George M. (1999) *The Corrections Yearbook, 1998*. Middletown, CT: The Criminal Justice Institute.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ambrosio, Tara-Jen and Schiraldi, Vincent. (1997) *From Classrooms to Cellblocks: A National Perspective*. Washington, DC: The Justice Policy Institute.
- 22 Gangi, Robert, Schiraldi, Vincent and Ziedenberg, Jason. (1998) *New York State of Mind: Higher Education v.s Prison Funding in the Empire State, 1988-1998*. Washington, DC: The Justice Policy Institute.
- 23 Taqi-Eddin, Khaled, Macallair, Dan and Schiraldi, Vincent. (1998) *Class Dismissed: Higher Education vs. Corrections During the Wilson Years*. San Francisco, CA: The Justice Policy Institute.