

# Education & Incarceration

by Bruce Western, Vincent Schiraldi & Jason Ziedenberg

August 28, 2003

Justice Policy Institute

4455 Connecticut Avenue NW

Suite B-500 Washington, DC 20008

v 202.363.7847

f 202.363.8677

[www.justicepolicy.org](http://www.justicepolicy.org)

## Table of Contents

<b><u>Introduction: States Continue to Cut Education Funding</u></b>	<b><u>3</u></b>
<b><u>Incarceration and Educational Attainment</u></b>	<b><u>6</u></b>
<b><u>The Lifetime Likelihood of Education versus Incarceration</u></b>	<b><u>8</u></b>
<b><u>Recommendation: Reverse this Reality— Shift Resources Away from Incarceration Into Education</u></b>	<b><u>10</u></b>
<b><u>Methodology and Sources</u></b>	<b><u>12</u></b>
<b><u>Select Bibliography</u></b>	<b><u>12</u></b>
<b><u>Endnotes</u></b>	<b><u>13</u></b>

## About the Authors

**Bruce Western** is a Professor of Sociology at Princeton University, and **Vincent Schiraldi** and **Jason Ziedenberg** are, respectively, the Justice Policy Institute’s Executive Director and Director of Policy and Research.

## Acknowledgments

*Education and Incarceration* was authored by Bruce Western, Professor of Sociology at Princeton University, and Vincent Schiraldi and Jason Ziedenberg of the Justice Policy Institute. We would like to acknowledge the research, editorial and review assistance of Josh Guetzkow of Princeton University, Peter Wagner of the Prison Reform Action Center and Prisoners of the Census Project, Amy Hanauer, Executive Director of Policy Matters Ohio, and Laura Jones and Deborah Clark of the Justice Policy Institute. This report was designed by Julie Laudenslager of inhousegraphics, and was posted on the web by Riseup.net. The production of *Education and Incarceration* was funded by generous grants from the Open Society Institute—Criminal Justice Initiative, the JEHT Foundation, and the Public Welfare Foundation. The full report can be found at [www.justicepolicy.org](http://www.justicepolicy.org). The Justice Policy Institute seeks to end society’s reliance on incarceration and promotes effective and just solutions to social problems. JPI is a project of the Tides Center.

## Introduction: States Continue to Cut Education Funding<sup>1</sup>

*“I INTEND TO BUILD NO NEW PRISONS. I WANT TO INVEST IN EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. WE MUST FIND A CORRECTIONAL POLICY THAT IS COST-EFFECTIVE.”*

—New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson, shortly before his inauguration, *The Associated Press*, December 31, 2002.

*“I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO THE GOVERNOR WHO SAID THAT EDUCATION WAS HIS FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD PRIORITIES. MAYBE NOW HE IS THE GOVERNOR WHO BELIEVES CORRECTIONS IS HIS FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD PRIORITIES.”*

—John Hein, head of government affairs for the California Teachers Association, commenting on how cuts to California's corrections budget were spared in efforts to close the state's \$38 billion shortfall. *The Los Angeles Times*, January 11, 2003.

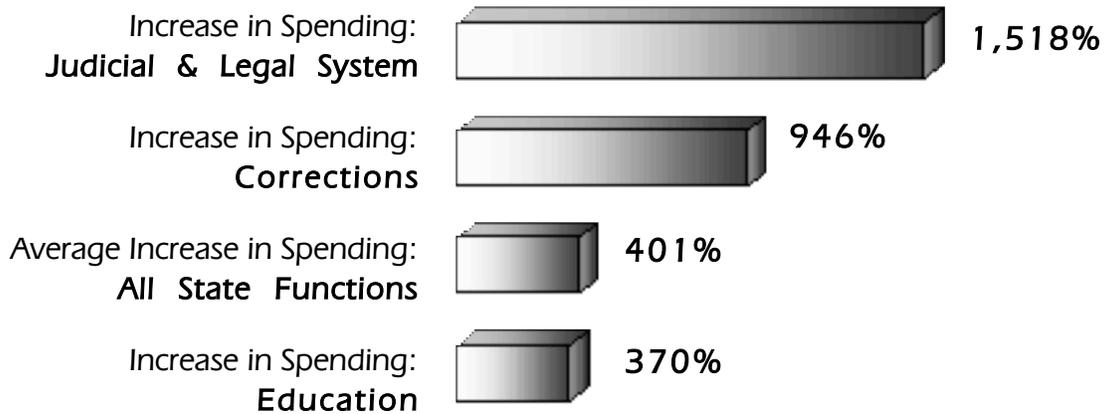
This year, most states reeled from their worst budget crises since World War II, and many sought to close their budget shortfalls by making deep cuts to education spending. As of May, 2003, 21 states were considering proposals that would affect funding levels for K-12 education including across the board cuts, reducing transportation funds, slashing state aid for teachers' salaries and lowering per pupil state aid.<sup>2</sup> States such as California, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Oregon cut public school spending midway through the current school year. For the upcoming year, at least 18 states are planning or considering cuts, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. The likely consequences include teacher layoffs, school closures, and shortened school years.<sup>3</sup>

Most states have cut aid to colleges and universities over the past year, resulting in faculty layoffs, cancelled classes, and large tuition increases. Sixteen states raised tuition by more than 10 percent for the current school year, and six states took the unusual step of enacting mid-year tuition hikes for the spring 2003 semester. Also, seven states have already raised tuition for the 2003-04 school year by anywhere from 10 percent to 39 percent. As of May, 2003, large tuition hikes were on the table in about 16 other states.

These cuts to education have come after two decades of growth in K-12 and college enrolment, and as other state functions have seen larger increases in their appropriations. To be clear, this country still spends more on various kinds of education than corrections—with state and local governments spending roughly 30 cents of every dollar on education (including K-12, higher education and vocational training), and eight cents of every dollar on justice functions (including corrections, police and the courts).

But from 1977 to 1999, total state and local expenditures on corrections increased by 946%—about 2.5 times the rate of increase of spending on all levels of education (370%).<sup>4</sup> Looking at the issue another way, a Post Secondary Opportunities analysis has shown that between 1980 and 2000, when the national prison population quadrupled from 500,000 to 2 million, corrections’ share of all state and local spending grew by 104%, higher education’s share of all state and local spending dropped by 21%.<sup>5</sup> The National Conference of State Legislatures reported in July, 2003 that next year, in the states, K-12 education is budgeted to *rise* by a modest 1.5%, spending on corrections is expected to *rise* by 1.1%, while general fund spending on higher education is budgeted to *decline* by 2.3%.<sup>6</sup>

**FIGURE 1: EDUCATION OR INCARCERATION?  
The Growth in Spending on Corrections  
was 2.5 times Greater than on Education.**



Source: Gifford, Sidra Lea. (February, 2002) Justice Expenditure and Employment in the United States, 1999. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs.  
To maintain consistency in reporting, the Bureau of Justice Statistics analysis of expenditure was not adjusted for inflation.

As states struggle to close budget gaps, and keep funding various kinds of high quality education, the costs of paying for a \$150 billion justice system (nearly \$50 billion of which is corrections) takes on a heightened significance. While some 19 states are implementing or considering cuts in corrections spending this year,<sup>7</sup> most states are choosing to maintain large incarcerated populations, and are continuing to pay the fiscal and social costs associated with having the largest prison system in the world.

The financial costs of prisons obscures the massive social costs these policy choices have in specific communities. Previous reports by the Justice Policy Institute, The Sentencing Project, Human Rights Watch and the Bureau of Justice Statistics have shown that both the risk of incarceration, and the impact of incarceration has been most concentrated among communities of color, specifically, the African American community. Other reports have shown that prison expansion has been fueled by incarceration of drug offenders, and that women and Latinos constitute growing segments of the country's ever expanding corrections system.

In this policy brief, we will focus more precisely on the question of who has been most affected by the growth of the corrections system, and illustrate how the impact of the decision to fund the prisons over schools has been concentrated among Americans with little education. The improved high school completion rates seen among minority men during the 1990s masked another reality: large segments of the African American community with little schooling were added to the nation's prisons and jails. African American men have been so disproportionately affected by the growth of the prison system that serving time has become a common event for young African American men with little schooling. By fleshing out the relationship between low educational attainment and the increased lifetime risk of incarceration, this brief will provide another sense of the scale of the policy decision to invest in prisons over schools.

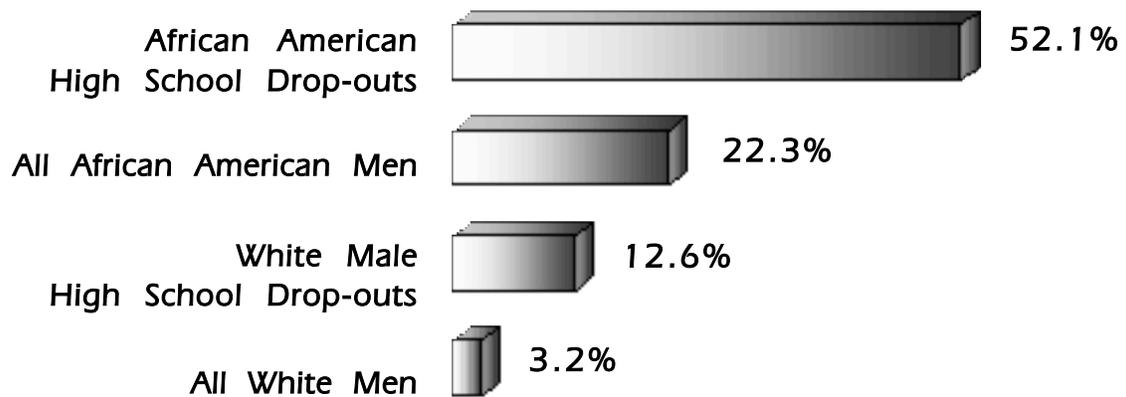
## Incarceration and Educational Attainment

As the educational prospects of most Americans improved during the 1990s, the growth of the prison system masked how millions of Americans with little education are ending up behind bars. In *Educational and Correctional Populations*, the Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that, in the late 1990s, 68% of state prison inmates had not received a high school diploma.<sup>8</sup> That same study showed that while there was an increase in the number of prisoners participating in an educational program since their admission over the 1990s, the incarcerated population access to educational programming has not kept up with the growth in prison and jail populations. The proportion of state prison inmates who reported taking educational courses while incarcerated declined from 57% in 1991, to 52% in 1997, during a time when the prison population grew from 792,535 to 1,176,564. Not only is our use of incarceration highly concentrated among men with little schooling, but corrections systems are doing less and less to “correct” the problem by reducing educational opportunities for the growing number of prisoners. Our analysis shows that the nation’s corrections systems now imprison large communities of people who were not part of the national improvements in educational attainment over the 1990s.

The most recent prison and jail surveys show that 1.6% of young white men were incarcerated in 2002. But according to research compiled by Princeton University’s Bruce Western, 1 in 10 young (age 22-30) white high school drop outs were in prison or jail in 1999, and among white men in their early thirties (age 30-34), 13 % of high school drop outs had prison records by 1999. So, the impact of the country’s increasing use of incarceration for white men is better understood as an increase in the use of imprisonment among men of little schooling.

The impact of prison on young men with little schooling was even greater among African American men. In 1999, an astonishing 52% of African American male high school drop-outs had prison records by their early thirties (age 30-34).

**FIGURE 2: PERCENTAGE OF MEN BORN 1965-69 (AGE 30-34) WITH PRISON RECORDS (1999), BY RACE AND EDUCATION.**



Source: Western, Bruce, Pettit, Becky, and Guetzkow, Josh. Black Economic Progress in the Era of Mass Imprisonment. In *Collateral Damage: The Social Cost of Mass Incarceration*, edited by Meda Chesney-Lind and Marc Mauer. New York: Free Press.

## The Lifetime Likelihood of Education versus Incarceration

In 1997, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) estimated that 9% of American males, and 29% of African American males born in 1991 will spend some time in prison in their lifetime.<sup>9</sup> In Figure 3, Western extend and refines the methodology used by BJS to apply the lifetime risk of incarceration to age cohorts and specific groups, updating these figures with the 2000 Census, to understand where that lifetime risk is most concentrated.<sup>10</sup>

**FIGURE 3: PERCENTAGE OF NON-HISPANIC AFRICAN AMERICAN, BORN 1965-69 AND WHITE MEN EXPERIENCING LIFE EVENTS BY 1999.**

ALL MEN		
LIFE EVENT	WHITE	AFRICAN AMERICAN
Prison incarceration	3.2	22.4
Bachelor's degree	31.6	12.5
Military service	14.0	17.4
Marriage	72.5	59.3
NON-COLLEGE MEN		
LIFE EVENT	WHITE	AFRICAN AMERICAN
Prison incarceration	6.0	31.9
High School Diploma/ GED	73.5	64.4
Military service	13.0	13.7
Marriage	72.8	55.9
<p><i>Note: The incidence of all life events except prison incarceration were calculated from the 2000 census.</i></p>		

Source: Petti, Becky and Western, Bruce. (March, 2003). *Mass Imprisonment in the Life Course: Race and Class Inequality in U.S. Incarceration*. Princeton: Princeton University.

Of men born from 1965-69, 3% of whites and 22% of African Americans will have likely experienced prison time by 1999. Among African American men born during that time, 32% of that cohort without college degrees would likely have a prison record by the end of millennium. While the findings are consistent with those above that show the risk of prison being concentrated among men with the least schooling, among all African American men in their early thirties, the percent that would likely experience prison (22.4%) by 1999 was nearly double the percent who likely earn a college degree (12.5%). In 2002, the Justice Policy Institute analyzed data from the US Justice Department and the National Center for Education Statistics and found that there were more African American men of any age incarcerated (791,000) than were enrolled in higher education (603,000) in 2000.<sup>11</sup>

While the authors do not maintain that every person in prison would not be there had they had access to a high quality education, the policy choices of the last two decades have left a legacy of growing state investment in prisons for young men of color.

## **Recommendation: Reverse this Reality— Shift Resources Away from Incarceration Into Education**

As a result of choices on where government dollars are spent, and the kind of justice system and educational system policymakers have chosen to provide, the lifetime likelihood of African American men going to prison is nearly twice as high as their getting a college degree, and more than half of all African American men in their early thirties without high school degrees have prison records. By lengthening sentences, passing mandatory sentencing laws, curbing parole, reducing alternatives to incarceration and building new prisons, policymakers have created the conditions where hundreds of thousands of people with little schooling are coursing through the largest prison and jail system in the world, instead of being educated in world class high schools and top shelf public universities. To make matters worse, once in prison, our corrections systems are failing to provide the educational programming that this population needs, further hobbling the chances of ex-prisoners to re-enter the economy when they re-enter their communities.

Since those with the lowest educational attainment face heightened risk of incarceration, and since our penal institutions are filled with people who have failed to obtain the academic credentials that would reduce their likelihood of incarceration, another policy approach might redirect spending from prisons to front end solutions, ensure high quality education, increase high school completion rates, expand opportunities for post-secondary education, and enrich the neighborhoods with community-based learning and services. Put another way, the authors recommend that policy makers need to follow the rhetorical course charted by Governor Richardson, not Governor Davis.

As discussed above, states can find the money they need to re-invest in education and communities by reducing prison populations and creating alternatives to cut incarceration costs. The state budget crisis and a shift in public opinion favoring treatment over incarceration have created a context where some states have begun to make cuts to their burdensome correctional costs. In 2001 and 2002, Republican governors in Ohio, Illinois, Michigan and Florida decided to close prisons. This year, the Republican-controlled House and Senate in Texas, enacted legislation signed by Governor Rick Perry (R) to divert thousands of low level drug offenders from prison into treatment. In both Louisiana, the state with the nation's highest incarceration rate, and Michigan, a state which had a Republican-controlled House and Senate and a Republican Governor, policymakers rolled back mandatory sentences and transferred sentencing discretion to judges. Voters in Arizona and California have passed ballot initiatives diverting drug offenders from prison into treatment.

Polling results show that public attitudes have shifted, and the voters are now ready to embrace a wide array of prevention, rehabilitation and alternative sentencing approaches. One recent survey conducted by the polling firm Belden, Russonello and Stewart found that the public believes that laws should be changed to reduce the incarceration of nonviolent offenders, and that rehabilitation should still be the top priority of the justice system. Polls taken in December 2001 in California and Pennsylvania found that respondents in those states put prison budgets at the top of the list for cuts in the upcoming budget session. A poll commissioned by the Open Society Institute's Criminal Justice Initiative found that the public favors dealing with the roots of crime over harsh sentencing by a two-to-one margin, 65% to 32%. This is a dramatic change from public attitudes in 1994, when other polling found that 48% of Americans favored addressing the causes of crime and 42% preferred the punitive approach.<sup>12</sup>

By diverting funds spent on prisons to support a high quality education system and communities most impacted by high crime and high incarceration rates, policymakers can diminish one of the key factors associated with risk of incarceration—lower educational attainment, and school failure. Spending less on cellblocks and more on classrooms will represent a significant policy change that will reduce the cycle that fuels imprisonment of so many people with little schooling, and educational, public safety and economic opportunity of the most affected communities.

## Methodology and Sources

This paper summarizes several significant findings from a body of work produced by Dr. Bruce Western, Professor of Sociology, Princeton University and various co-authors. Most of the figures represented in this paper are estimates of the varied impacts of prison and jails on labor markets, the nation's economy, and specific communities. Estimates are based on data compiled from the Bureau of the Census, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, and the Center for Human Resource Research (National Longitudinal Survey of Youth). The principal sources for this policy brief are listed at the end of the report, and a detailed explanation of the methodology used to derive each figure can be found in the original sources, many of which are posted on-line at <http://www.princeton.edu/~western/>

## Select Bibliography

Gifford, Sidra Lea. (February, 2002) *Justice Expenditure and Employment in the United States, 1999*. Washington, DC: Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Harlow, Caroline Wolf. (2002) *Educational and Correctional Populations*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs.

Schiraldi, Vincent, and Ziedenberg, Jason. (2002) *Cellblocks or Classrooms?: The Funding of Higher Education and Its Impact on African American Men*. Washington, DC: The Justice Policy Institute.

Petti, Becky and Western, Bruce. (March, 2003). *Mass Imprisonment in the Life Course: Race and Class Inequality in U.S. Incarceration*. Princeton: Princeton University.

Western, Bruce, Becky Pettit, and Josh Guetzkow. (2002) *Black Economic Progress in the Era of Mass Imprisonment*. In *Collateral Damage: The Social Cost of Mass Incarceration*, edited by Meda Chesney-Lind and Marc Mauer. New York: Free Press.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The authors of this report are Bruce Western, Professor of Sociology, Princeton University, and Vincent Schiraldi and Jason Ziedenberg of the Justice Policy Institute.
- <sup>2</sup> *State Budget Update* (April 2003). Washington, DC: National Conference of State Legislatures.
- <sup>3</sup> Johnson, Nicholas and Ribeiro, Rose. (May, 2003) *Severe State Fiscal Crisis May Be Worsening*. Washington, DC: Center for Budget and Planning Priorities.
- <sup>4</sup> Gifford, Sidra Lea. (February, 2002) *Justice Expenditure and Employment in the United States, 1999*. Washington, DC: Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- <sup>5</sup> Schiraldi, Vincent and Ziedenberg, Jason. (2002) *Cellblocks or Classrooms: The Funding of Higher Education and Corrections and Its Impact on African American Men*. Washington, DC: The Justice Policy Institute.
- <sup>6</sup> *State Budget and Tax Actions, 2003*. (July, 2003). Denver, Colorado: National Conference of State Legislatures.
- <sup>7</sup> Johnson and Ribeiro, 2003
- <sup>8</sup> Harlow, Caroline Wolf. (2002) *Educational and Correctional Populations*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs
- <sup>9</sup> Bonczar, Thomas P. and Beck, Allen J. (1997). *Lifetime Likelihood of Going to State or Federal Prison*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs.
- <sup>10</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of estimating the lifetime likelihood of imprisonment for different racial cohorts, see Western, Bruce and Pettit, Becky. (July, 2002) *Inequality in Lifetime Risks of Imprisonment*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University
- <sup>11</sup> Schiraldi and Ziedenberg, 2002.
- <sup>12</sup> For more information on the Peter D. Hart Research Associates February 2002 survey, please see <http://www.soros.org/crime/>

# Justice Policy Institute

4455 Connecticut Avenue NW Suite B-500

Washington DC 20008

v 202-363-7847

f 202-363-8677

info@justicepolicy.org

[www.justicepolicy.org](http://www.justicepolicy.org)