

Mass Incarceration: A Social Action Project

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## **1. Definition**

The United States has one of the largest rates of imprisonment in the world (Amnesty USA, 2017). This has been an issue of great concern. This issue is known as Mass Incarceration. In its simplest form Mass Incarceration can be defined as the imprisonment of a large number of people. In terms of a social problem the definition has more content.

Since 1980, the US prison population has quadrupled, an increase largely driven by heavier penalties for non-violent offenses. (amnesty USA, 2017). The US also accounts for 5% of the world's population, but is responsible for nearly 22% of the world's prison population. (amnesty USA, 2017). 1 in 3 black men in the US will go to prison or jail if this current trend continues. (Amnesty USA, 2017). There has been an ongoing concern regarding racial disparities throughout the criminal justice system in the US.

There are four major concepts that should be kept in mind when thinking about modern prison trends. These concepts also provide a definition and the reasons behind mass incarceration. First, private prisons do not cause mass incarceration. Private prisons are for profiting off of high crime and for creating corporate incentive to foster tough punishment. Second, Marijuana legalization is not a remedy. Drug sentencing has accounted for about a third of the new American prison growth since the late 1970s. (D'Amico). Even if nonviolent marijuana offenders were released, America would still be a world leader in incarceration rates. The third concept is that the problem of prison growth transcends drug prohibition. At a glance much of America's prison growth appears to have come in lockstep with the War on Drugs. There is an idea that repealing prohibition across substance types would eliminate many of the adaptive problems at play. Lastly, mass incarceration transcends the American experience.

Prisoners who are victims of mass incarceration can endure a significant impact on their need of self-actualization. This need represents a person's desire to experience fulfillment through personal growth. (McLeod, 2007) A person who has received this need is content in reaching their full potential. Self-satisfaction is paramount when establishing this need (McLeod, 2007).

People who are imprisoned experience little privacy and have rights stripped from them. They often live in unsanitary conditions and their goals are limited in what they can accomplish. (Haney, 2001) In fact, prisoners tend to experience the opposite of self-actualization. Their self-worth seems to diminish once being involuntarily ostracized from society. Although some people develop a spiritual connection while incarcerated, others experience severe chronic depression and may exhibit suicidal ideation (Haney, 2001).

The idea of safety and security within prisons can be questioned. Research has found that often times inmates will isolate themselves in their cells or constantly be alert of their surroundings in fear of being subjected to violence (Haney, 2001) Many prisoners have experienced some form of trauma before being incarcerated. Much of their time in this system is a reminder of this trauma, which may lead to re-traumatization (Haney, 2001). Despite transitional services that exist for former prisoners, their security can also be jeopardized by lack of access to employment.

## **2. Social Justice and Human Rights**

Social justice is literally, fair and equitable which among a group of fiends, but defined here more specifically as adherence to the principles of the Universal declarations of Human Rights in theory and in practice (Wronka, 2017). Looking at the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 2 states that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this

Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status (Wronka, 2017). Mass incarceration with a focus particularly on the African American community affects this article.

The black community is most heavily impacted by mass incarceration, which leaves many people wondering why there are racial and ethnic disparities in the United States incarceration rates in every region of the country. Nationally, Blacks are incarcerated five times more than whites are, and Hispanics are nearly twice as likely to be incarcerated as Whites (U.S Census 2010). Issues like racial disparity interfere with the U.S to protect, respect and fulfill the obligations in regards to the right to be free from discrimination, to liberty and security of the person. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, one in three African American men can expect to be incarcerated at some point. While people of color make up about 30 percent of the United States' population, they account for 60 percent of those imprisoned (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014). This affects everyone and continues to compromise futures and annihilate ethnic communities.

Wronka (2017), discussed core principles of human rights documents on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination (CERD). There is one of many essential themes, which is relevant to mass incarceration. Public authorities shall not permit, promote, or incite racial discrimination; dissemination of ideas or based on racial superiority or hatred, incitement to racial discrimination, acts of violence, and provision of assistance, including financing, shall be prohibited by law (Wronka, 2017). There are five crucial notions of human rights, which tie into the issue of mass incarceration (Wronka, 2017). These notions consist of human dignity; non discrimination; civil and political rights; economic, social, and cultural rights; and solidarity rights. In regards to human dignity, it refers to all human beings being born free and equal to

dignity and rights (Wronka 2017). The liberty to pursue the quest for human dignity free from discrimination and the abuse of political authority (Wronka, 2017). Economic, social, and cultural rights reinforce that government provides for basic necessities to ensure an existence worthy of human dignity (Wronka, 2017). Solidarity rights state that all persons should have a right to peace, development, international humanitarian disaster relief, international distributive justice and preservation of the common and cultural heritages of humanity (Wronka, 2017). While addressing mass incarceration, there tends to be many policies and laws, which have violated human rights, causing problems of mass incarceration.

There are a couple of provisos that come to mind when I think of the way that Mass Incarceration has affected human rights in this country. Two Provisos that addresses America's human rights issues are "The Hypocrisy of Government" and "The Demonization of Others". These issues continue to affect the injustices that are afflicted upon American citizens of color on a daily basis.

America's hypocrisy with human rights issues is very frustrating. Our government has made it known to the world that we have issues with the way that other countries such as North Korea, Russia, Syria, and China treat their citizens. The US takes a leadership role at the United Nations to inflict sanctions on countries that do not provide what we call human rights to their citizens. If we as a country can't look at ourselves and really recognize how Mass Incarceration has created a social injustice in our own country, then it is our own government who has become the "hypocrite". It is the "Hypocrisy of our own Government" that should really be under investigation. We have to ask ourselves WHY? Why is it that in America, Blacks are incarcerated five times more than whites? Why is it that in America, Hispanics are nearly twice as likely to be incarcerated as Whites? Our government can't take the lead as the true fighter for

human rights in today's world until we truly evaluate our own practices and exercise laws that are fair to all of its citizens.

America's government must take responsibility for the separation of races and cultures in this country. "The Demonization of Others" has been a long standing practice of our government that has damage human relations between races and ethnic groups since the day it was created. Blacks have always been looked upon as lower class. It also took a very long time before blacks could even be recognized as a complete human being in this country. They were demonized. They were portrayed as being evil people, rapist, and ignorant. The demonization of black people continues today in relation to mass incarceration. Blacks are shown in the media as criminals. The news comes on every night and shows a black person involved with breaking the law. It can be a fight, stolen car, conflict with law enforcement, and many other things. The problem is not that they are always being shown on TV for breaking the law. The problem is that they are not the only race or ethnic group that is breaking the law. Black people being in conflict with the law sells to the American public. Many TV shows that demonize Black people receive high ratings. Shows such as Maury, Bad Girls Club, Cops, and others portray black people as people who have no respect for society. Our media demonizes black people and our government allows it to happen.

### **3. Relevant History of the Problem**

In 1865 the thirty-eighth congress ratified the 13th Amendment formally abolishing slavery and involuntary servitude in the United States. The passage of this monumental legislation advanced the rights and liberties of African-Americans, former slaves, and poor people (Library of Congress, n.d.). Despite ushering in these sweeping advances, there is a

frequently overlooked clause in the thirteenth amendment which helped to birth the current mass incarceration phenomenon.

Section 1 of the 13th Amendment reads: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction” (Library of Congress, n.d.). Those six words, “except as a punishment for crime,” set precedence for additional legislation, policies, and practices from which the modern prison industrial complex and the phenomenon of mass incarceration grew to its current size. The vast majority of incarcerated persons are poor people and people of color.

As with many systems of oppression, reforms made by the ruling class did not result in an end to the oppression, it simply changed the way it was meted out to the oppressed. Slavery was abolished in name, but continued to function in practice. By the end of 1865 Mississippi and South Carolina had passed legislation, which would come to be known as the Black Codes, legalizing the discrimination and criminalization of former slaves. Freed blacks were required to sign exploitive yearly labor contracts with local plantation owners and laborers. If they failed to secure a contract by the required date, or if they were found to be guilty of any other range of minor infractions, including vagrancy, and loitering, they could be fined, convicted of crimes, thrown in jail and subjected to forced labor. By the end of 1866 all of the formerly Confederate, Southern states followed suit, passing their own Black Codes, and under these laws thousands of newly freed blacks were criminalized and locked away as slaves of the state, essentially resulting in America’s first prison boom (Alexander, 2010).

Mass incarceration has disproportionately impacted people of color. Despite the fact that African-Americans make up only 13% of the general population, they represent 40% of the

prison/jail population. Latinos account for 16% of the general population but account for 19%% of those in prison or jail. While Whites make up 64% of the general population the account for only 39% of those in prison or jail (Wagner & Rabuy, 2016). Some proponents of the current prison system attribute this disproportionality to personal behavior and life choices, citing that African-Americans and Latinos use drugs and commit crimes at higher rates than whites (“Results from 2013 National Survey,”2014). Multiple studies have confirmed that people of all races and ethnicities used drugs and alcohol at similar rates.

Despite the constitutional mandate of the 14th Amendment, 1867, guaranteeing “equal protection” under the law, African-Americans and people of color have regularly been subjected to unequal treatment within the criminal justice system in comparison with their Caucasian counterparts (Library of Congress, n.d.). From the Black Codes, to Jim Crow and segregation, to Redlining, to unequal distribution of wealth, examples of this bias can be seen throughout history. However, one of the most egregious modern examples of this disproportionality can be seen in the context of the criminal justice system (Alexander, 2010).

In modern US history, this disproportionality can be most clearly seen when examining the intents and impacts of the so-called “War on Drugs.” The War on Drugs, initiated by President Nixon, and brought to full-scale under President Reagan, swept through communities of color, particularly those in poor urban areas, with devastating precision. The United States prison population exploded as a result of heavily funded mandates and extensive policies such as Mandatory Minimums for nonviolent drug offenses, and No-Knock Warrants.

Included in these policies were racial biases such as the disparate sentencing between the possession or use of powder cocaine, often associated with white middle class youth and business people, versus the possession and use of “crack” or “rock” cocaine typically associated



with inner-city use and people of color. At one point, despite the fact that pharmacologically the two substances are the same, possession or use of crack cocaine carried a sentence of over 100 times the amount of powder cocaine (“Drug Policy,” 2015). This difference in sentencing, coupled with the rise of Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams, and over-policing of poor urban areas, resulted in millions of mostly black, brown, and poor people being swept into an endless cycle of incarceration and state control.

During his time in office as the 41st President of the United States Barack Obama made criminal justice reform a priority for the his own office as well as empowering his appointees in the Department of Justice and in other branches of government to work towards reform (Obama, 2017). In July 2015, President Obama became the first sitting US President to set foot inside of a Federal Prison. During a brief statement given from inside El Reno Federal prison in Oklahoma, the President stated that this visit is “part of our efforts to highlight both the challenges and the opportunities we face in regards to prison reform.” President Obama continued by reiterating that although the United States represents a mere 5% of global population it holds a staggering 25% of the world’s incarcerated persons and further challenged the American people to reconsider “whether this is the smartest way for us to control crime as well as to rehabilitate individuals” (“President Obama’s Historic Prison Visit,” 2015)

In August 2010, Congress passed the Fair Sentencing Act (FSA) and President Obama signed this act into law. The FSA helped to reduce the disparity between the difference in sentencing for powder cocaine and crack cocaine down from 100:1 to 18:1. This law also eliminated mandatory minimums for simple possession and use charges associated with the drug. This set a powerful precedence in reimagining America’s drug laws.

As part of the broad-based prison reforms under the Obama administration, a program was also started creating a semi-autonomous school district within all Federal prisons; enabling prisoners to further their education and encouraging greater opportunity when they were released from prison (Obama, 2017). When asked about the relevance of this program in 2016, President Obama shared that “every dollar spent on prison education represents \$4 or \$5 saved on re-incarceration” (Obama, 2017). These reforms, and others made during his Presidency, aim to not only address the quantity of people who are swept into the prison system but also to equip those already incarcerated with additional skills, knowledge, and tools to re-engage in civil society, creating a better life for themselves and their families, upon release (Obama, 2017).

#### **4. Article II of the Universal Declaration and Demographics of Problem**

Article Two of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Mass incarceration is a problem because Latinos and blacks are filling up the prison system. They are being arrested and thrown in jail because they do not have the funds for a great attorney to get them out of trouble. When these individuals are incarcerated, it allows for other people to discriminate against them like African Americans were discriminated against for centuries. The criminal justice system is used to help define criminals and the discrimination of

criminals has become perfectly legal. Statistics show that African Americans make up a majority of the prison system, and because of this it bring upon another opportunity for them to be discriminated against.

There was a time where there was no sentencing guidelines for specific crimes. Individuals, especially African American males were getting outrageous sentences for misdemeanor crimes they committed. Whites were getting lesser sentences for their actions until the Fair Sentencing Act was passed in 2010. With the sentencing guidelines, there are mandatory minimums for particular crimes. Individuals were getting off easy for crimes that that they should have done a longer sentence for. An example being, A Caucasian could kill a black person, and get off with probation or a few years in prison. Now with the sentencing guidelines anyone who commits a particular crimes has to do the mandatory minimum. African American men make up a majority of the prison system. You can argue that the way laws are set up, most individuals who live in urban areas are going to slip up at some point. The way a lot of urban areas are set up it is more likely that the individuals who live there are at a disadvantage. Homicides and drug dealing are one of the biggest crimes committed in urban areas. Drugs and guns are easily accessible in these areas which is why more individuals are arrested. Urban areas have more police officers patrolling their areas than people do in the suburbs.

Throughout history, minorities, in particular blacks, have been brutally scrutinized by police officers. We have heard in the popular press lately of cases where police officers have discriminated against black males for no reason. There are a few cases today where law enforcement has killed unarmed black men. This creates negative views towards law enforcement. This is why it is key that police officers are educated in street knowledge, and grew to recognize that not everyone gets the same opportunities to succeed in life. For some

individuals, the streets are all they know. They may come from broken homes, or they just did not get the proper attention they needed. They turned to violence for attention. Police officers need to take the time to communicate with the residents of the area that they patrol to show that they care and they are not looking to lock up individuals who may look different from them. Some police officers have a very negative stereotypical view towards people of color. This will not change unless law enforcement begins to step out of their comfort zone and make themselves a positive presence throughout urban neighborhoods. Chief Baldwin of Fort Pierce, Florida, he said in a recent interview that all of our patrol officers in that area are required to conduct routine foot patrols with an emphasis on building relationship with residents (National Gang Center, 2014, p. 8.)

The United States is 5% of the world population but is 25% of the population in the prison system. 1 out of 4 African American men will be incarcerated. In 1972, 300,000 were incarcerated, now there is 2.3 million. African Americans are 1 million of the 2.3 that are incarcerated. African Americans are incarcerated at nearly six times the rate of whites. In 2008 African Americans and Hispanics made up 58% even though they are 1 quarter of the US Population. 1 in 100 African American women are incarcerated The United States has the highest rate of incarceration in the world. 95% of elected Prosecutors are Caucasian. Black men make up 40% of the prison population. According to the prison policy initiative, there are 1,351,000 incarcerated on a state level. 646,000 in local jails, but 451,000 of them are non-convicted. 211,000 on a federal level. 34,000 in youth jails. 14,000 in territorial prison, and 33,000 in immigration detention. \$70 billion is spent on prisons yearly in the country. Nationwide, African-Americans represent 26% of juvenile arrests, 44% of youth who are

detained, 46% of the youth who are judicially waived to criminal court, and 58% of the youth admitted to state prisons (Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice).

English is the most common language used in the United States. Language can be a barrier for correctional officers in the prison system when they have to communicate to Latinos who only speak Spanish. Learning the Spanish language is not a requirement of correctional officers when they accept the position. Language can also be an issue when police officers encounter individuals who only know Spanish. When an officer is attempting to make an arrest, and speak to the individual, that individual may not understand what is being said to him.

English has never been made the official language of the United States. There is a sense that if a foreigner comes over to the country, it is their responsibility to learn the English language instead of Americans learning their language in order to communicate with them. Learning the Spanish language is important in the prison system due to the increase of gang members in the system. There are different Hispanic gangs in the system, and if correctional officers do not understand the language, the gang members can easily communicate to one another with the correctional officers having no idea what is being said.

Mass incarceration has been an ongoing issue up for debate in the political arena. Mass incarceration can be deciphered into several different avenues of discrimination. Mass incarceration in the United States has affected many individuals who have disabilities and medical conditions including mental health illnesses. There have been multiple studies which have pointed to the disproportionate amount of individuals incarcerated who suffer from chronic mental illness and other related medical conditions. Mental health illnesses such as Schizophrenia, Bi-Polar Disorder, PTSD and Generalized Anxiety Disorder affect many of the individuals who are incarcerated within the United States.

According to Prins (2014), “People with mental illnesses are understood to be overrepresented in the U.S. criminal justice system, and estimates of the prevalence of mental illnesses in corrections settings are crucial for planning and implementing preventive and diversionary policies and programs.” In many of these cases where individuals have been incarcerated, the mental health illness was either not taken into consideration or addressed. Mental health continues to be a topic that is not widely discussed within the criminal justice system. Criminal justice systems such as jails, prisons, probation and parole do not have the means to provide mental health services to those in the criminal justice system. Many individuals incarcerated who suffer from mental health illnesses also are faced with other issues such as poverty, unemployment, homelessness and substance abuse. When these individuals are incarcerated and their mental health illnesses are not adequately addressed, committing crime becomes more prevalent which adds to the high criminal recidivism rate in the United States. Individuals who suffer from mental health illnesses should have their mental health needs to be assessed thoroughly and addressed before being placed in a criminal justice setting. More programs need to be put in place to help with individual conducted of crimes who suffer from mental health illnesses.

Mental health plays a crucial role in the disproportionate amount of people incarcerated in the United States. However, gender and sex has played an even more extensive role on how the criminal justice system has failed in the United States. Not only is there an overrepresentation of women versus men in criminal justice systems. There are also disproportionate numbers of women who are incarcerated by various states. To fully understand how gender and sex play a role in mass incarceration, it is imperative that statistics be explored. Nationally, there are more than 8 times as many women incarcerated in state and federal prisons and local jails as there

were in 1980, increasing in number from 12, 300 in 1980 to 190, 271 by 2010. Women now account for 7% of the population in state and federal prisons. The male to female imprisonment ration indicates the number of male inmates to every female inmate (Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics).

In 1977, across the states, there were an average of 26 male prisoners for every female prisoner. Over the past 20 years, the war on drugs has caused significant rise in the number of women incarcerated and their access to adequate drug treatment. This issue correlates with mental health illnesses. Many individuals including women have been placed in the criminal justice system and have dealt with trauma or sexual abuse. Many of these women have also been substance dependent and unable to seek appropriate treatment for substance abuse problems. Criminal justice systems do not provide adequate services for women who have experienced severe trauma and mental health illnesses. In efforts to rectify this situation, more programs need to be put in place for women dealing with mental health illnesses in the criminal justice realm.

Gender effects lawmaking and the administration of criminal justice because women are less likely to commit crimes. Males have always been involved with violent crimes. Females are known to commit nonviolent crimes like selling drugs and prostitution. Throughout history the criminal justice system was set up to deal with men, because females were not out in the world doing things that could potentially get them in trouble with the law. But now we see times have changes. Females are involved in criminal activity but a lot of them get involved as a way to supply for their family. A lot of single mothers will get into the drug dealership game because they are not making enough money to provide for their kids. When they are arrested for these crimes, the criminal justice system will not be hard on them. They will more than likely receive a mild sentence, because they recognize how this breaks up families. While females are prison, the

ones who are mothers will most likely behave and not do anything that could potentially get their sentence to be longer. They just want to return home to their children. When it comes to juveniles who are females, the courts are not as easy on them like they are mothers. You can argue they see young females as just another criminal, and they get harsher sentences. Men are sentenced to longer time in prison than females are. It is not even looked at that a lot of men that are sentenced have a family. The court system does not look at the family situation with men like they do women.

### **5. Relating to Human Rights Documents**

When looking at social issues such as mass incarceration of people of color, conflicting political opinions and worldviews often cause the lens by which people view these issues to be skewed. However, by focusing on a human rights perspective, it becomes much clearer what the specific course of action to solve this problem should be. While the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a good starting point to gain familiarity with what rights people are entitled to by virtue of being human, the list is not expansive enough. Therefore, additional measures have been added to give a greater depth when outlining specific rights people are entitled to.

One of these instruments is the Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR). This convention is made up of 31 articles, which are divided into five parts. The first part contains just the first article, which gives an overview of the perspective of the rest of the CESCR. Chiefly, this article recognizes the right of people to self-determination to pursue goals related to culture, social structures and economics, as well as the ability to manage their own resources. Most importantly, people should not be deprived of their means of subsistence.



This one article alone has implications for this issue in particular. By its very nature, being in prison means that people's ability to exercise their self-determination is limited. While 100% of all able-bodied people in prison are expected to work, these wages rarely exceed \$2 per hour, and sometimes can be as low as \$0.12 per hour (Wagner & Rabuy, 2016). That is, of course, in states that pay people in prison for their work. States such as Georgia and Texas do not pay people in prison who perform labor any kind of wage (Wagner & Rabuy, 2016). People who are not incarcerated who work similar jobs, such as in the manufacturing of textiles or office furniture, often earn around \$10 per hour (Wagner & Rabuy, 2016). Clearly, a person in prison has far less economic opportunity than someone who is not in prison.

However, this reduced economic output continues even when people are released from prison. The stigma of being formerly incarcerated lingers with people who are released from prison, which makes it difficult to find jobs. One study found that only 40% of employers would consider hiring someone who was formerly incarcerated, though this number was lower for jobs in customer service, or ones that required handling money (Schmitt & Warner, 2010). These numbers have significant implications. Differences in incarceration rates between young white and young black men accounted for about one third of the black-white employment gap (Schmitt & Warner, 2010). In other words, it can clearly be documented that just having previously been in prison is enough to reduce someone's economic potential.

Some methods of fixing this have been proposed. One possible suggestion is to forbid people from asking about previous incarcerations on most job applications. That way, people's ability to integrate back into mainstream society would be increased, and they would be able to be judged on their merits and not because of their past mistakes (Schmitt & Warner, 2010). In addition, people should work towards reducing the sentences for nonviolent crimes such as drug

offenses, which would reduce the number of people who are incarcerated (Schmitt & Warner, 2010).

The second part of CESCO is made up of articles two through five, which state that these rights are available to all, regardless of their race or other status. This will be discussed in greater depth when analyzing the Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, which specifically addresses the prevention of racial discrimination.

The third part actually begins to outline the specific rights that should be provided. These include the right to work under just and favorable conditions, and the ability to form unions. As stated before, people who are incarcerated often earn far below what is considered minimum wage in the United States, and are forbidden from forming any kind of unions (Schmitt & Warner, 2010).

As stated before, the Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) promotes the strengthening of racial togetherness. This document encourages community building by discouraging all forms of racial discrimination and segregation. CERD states that all parties “shall not permit public authorities or public institutions, national or local, to promote or incite racial discrimination.” During this convention it was established that people of all races and ethnicities have “the right to equal treatment before the tribunals and all other organs administering justice...”

Racial profiling is a form of racial discrimination that has been prevalent in modern society. It has had an impact on mass incarceration and has accounted for people of color who are imprisoned. Racial profiling is an example of authorities taking advantage of their power and placing judgment on people based upon the color of their skin. It is defined as “the discriminatory practice by law enforcement officials of targeting individuals for suspicion of

crime based on the individual's race, ethnicity, religion or national origin." (ACLU) In many cases, people of color do not make up the majority of the population, but account for more than half the percentage of people who are stopped to be "stopped and frisked."

Since people of color are being targeted, it is clear that they would have an overwhelming presence in jails and presence. One million of the 2.3 million people incarcerated in the United States are African American. Research also shows that African Americans are incarcerated about six times the rate Whites are. (NAACP) This is a disproportionate amount of times that Blacks are being arrested compared to White people. If this was not accurate, then there would be less people imprisoned and mass incarceration would be less of a problem.

Not only are Blacks more likely to be arrested, they are also more likely to be held longer in jail and likely to receive longer jail sentences. One-third of people arrested for drug law violations is Black. Part of the reasoning behind this is that police enforcement is concentrated in high-crime areas. Research has proven that all races use drugs at the same rate. Criminal Justice professionals may have implicit racial bias which is described by having unintentional and unconscious beliefs that affect their decisions. Much of the time, people of color deal with socioeconomic burdens where they cannot afford efficient defense attorneys and get sentenced to prison. (The Sentencing Project)

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socioeconomic burdens where they cannot afford efficient defense attorneys and get sentenced to prison. (The Sentencing Project)

## **6. Levels of Interventions**

### **Meta-Macro Level Interventions**

Meta-macro interventions refer to those actions taken that are global in their perspective, aims, and goals. Referring to a systems oriented approach on an international level, meta-macro interventions can include efforts to shift consciousness, assumptions, and the collective understanding of a problem (Wronka, p.136, 2015)

The development of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, working towards a human rights culture, and a world that accepts and values the dignity and rights of all human persons are all examples of meta-macro efforts to bring peace and social justice into the human experience (David & Gerson, 2010). The creation of laws, articulation of policies and protocols that protect these rights and the meaningful cultivation of means for remediation and resolution when they are violated all represent concrete nonviolent ways of upholding justice. As the stalwart of human rights Cornell West reminds us, “Justice is what love looks like in public” (Supernegromaniac, 2011).

Social action projects aimed at addressing Mass Incarceration at the meta-macro level include advocating portions of the United States military budget be shifted to instead fund human needs at home. Moving funds away from building bombs, drones, and the perpetuation of foreign wars and instead focusing them on education, health care, housing, and job creation at home would provide options and secure a stronger safety net especially for those most marginalized.

In 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower delivered his Chance for Peace Address, in which he famously warned that, *“Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.”* (Eisenhower, 1953). In 2017, not only is there a thriving military industrial complex in the United States and globally, but a vast and powerful Prison Industrial Complex has also emerged. Through the increased privatization of prisons and probation services, and the use of “insourcing” of prison labor, prison has become a multi-billion dollar business.

The United States currently houses nearly one-quarter of the entire world population of incarcerated persons (US DOJ, 2013). For U.S residents born in 2001, the lifetime likelihood of incarceration for men is one in nine. One out of every nine men in the United States can expect to be incarcerated at some point in their lives. When one looks at the statistics along racial lines a startling discovery is made. For white men in the United States one in seventeen men will be imprisoned at some point in their lives. However, this number drops significantly to one out of every six Latino men and even further to one in three African-American men. A full thirty-three percent of the population of African-American men born in the year 2001 and after can expect to face incarceration during their lifetimes (Bonczar, 2003).

Shifting cultural consciousness away from this normalized view of incarceration will require large scale efforts on multiple fronts. There needs to be a global movement to define human rights and dignity and make clear that this scale of incarceration, of caging humans, is unacceptable, inhumane, and unlikely to bring peace. The United States needs to look to other countries with lower crime and imprisonment rates and find models that can be replicated. One of the Grand Challenges in Social Work is to promote Smart Decarceration, or the scaffolded

approach to closing prisons (Pettus-Davis & Epperson, 2015). Social Workers should advocate for this at all levels of interventions.

In 1969 the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (UN General Assembly, 1969) was enacted. Although the United States has both signed and ratified this treaty, it has done so with severe reservations and without commitment to adhering to all portions of it. This treaty should be strongly adhered to and its articles fully enacted to help protect all people in the United States from racial discrimination (Wronka, 2015).

Wronka states this interconnectedness in his book, *Human Rights and Social Justice*, by reminding us that “The local is connected to the state, the state is connected to the country, the country is connection to the continent, the continent is connected to the world, and the world is connected to the universe” (Wronka, p.132, 2015).

### **Macro-level Interventions:**

Macro-level interventions are often considered a primary intervention strategy and are aimed at addressing the whole population. Unlike other intervention strategies at the mezzo or micro levels, macro interventions do not require that one is close to the pathology of the problem to be positively affected by the outcomes of the intervention. The goal of a macro level intervention is to prevent people from “falling through the cracks” and encourage the ability to participate in community building thus improving everyone’s quality of life. (Wronka, p.127, 2015).

Macro-level interventions aimed at decreasing Mass Incarceration must include working to change the legal framework in the United States. In the U.S. laws govern and decide who goes to jail and for how long. Despite a clause in the Fourteenth Amendment guaranteeing the right to equal protection under the law, many more black, brown, and poor folk end up behind bars for

crimes where whites, and more affluent people, in similar circumstances walk free (Alexander, 2010). A nation-wide campaign aimed at shedding light on this level of disparity can help to change this. Writing letters to Senators, Congress people and elected officials advocating for a more equal and just meting out of justice can be a powerful and unifying social action.

Another social action would be a series of campaigns and trainings designed to expose the enduring effects of white supremacy in this country. The United States was built as a nation divided into the haves and the have nots almost exclusively around racial differences. The status of white as a racial construct has consistently been considered superior and elevated and the status of the “other” has consistently been seen as inferior and degraded. Slavery existed as a legalized form of discrimination and subjugation for centuries in our fledgling country. Even after slavery was abolished the discrimination, and terrorization of Blacks did not end. To the contrary, the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery, made prison sentences a new legalized form of slavery and white elites immediately began using this as a form of social control (DuVernay, 2016). Laws known as Black Codes were adopted in all formerly Confederate States and freed slaves were forced to sign contracts guaranteeing their labor to white plantation owners. If they refused to do so, or if they were found to be in violation of any number of major or minor infractions including, looking at a white woman, fishing to catch their own dinner, attempting to secure a business loan, they would be placed in jail and subjected to forced labor and atrocious conditions. Black people, especially black men, were criminalized and seen as predators (Alexander, 2010).

The systems of Jim Crow, and of segregation continued to provide normalized means of justifying white violence against black bodies. Public lynchings, bombings, shootings, murders, rapes, and all forms of corporeal and mental violence continued to occur well into the first



decades of the 21st century. To this day, Black lives continue to be sacrificed with near impunity by the police, the state, or even deranged white men who believe it is their obligation to “stand their ground” against teenagers with bags of Skittles wearing hoodies. Incarcerated millions of black bodies is an extension of this violence and subjugation (Alexander, 2010).

Owning the history of the country, not glossing over, or minimizing this violence is a first step to creating a beloved community. In order to change something, one must understand it. The United States must recognize the real history of slavery in this country, and globally, and its long lasting effects.

### **Mezzo-Level Interventions**

The mezzo level deals primarily with at risk groups to alleviate an individual and/or social problem (Wronka, 2017). These groups include physically or mentally ill groups; groups that are prone to illness and other vulnerable populations. Another vulnerable group of people who are at risk and who are invisible, is the black men and people of color living in America.

A lot of Black men who are a part of our judicial system are a product of their environment; men living in communities full of dilapidated buildings with broken windows, drug dealing in front of bodega’s and liquor stores which are strategically located in these poor communities. With some of these men having little to no education and are unemployed or have long-term unemployment, and have already been to prison or jail are also at risk for Mass incarceration. Young Black men being raised in a single-parent, working poor households are also at risk for Mass incarceration. Moreover, young Black men who are in gangs and deal drugs are too, at risk for Mass incarceration. Any Black man living in America with a history of substance abuse issues would most definitely be at risk for Mass incarceration. Without the

practice of Article 23 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, this phenomenon may continue to keep this Nation divided.

The mezzo level also looks at ways in which to promote sustainable communities. Given the relationship between Black American men and Mass incarceration, we need to ask ourselves, “why so many Black men and other people of color are imprisoned and how can we eliminate Mass incarceration”. Looking at the kinds of resources in the communities these black inmates come from may have a positive impact. For example, seeing what kinds of reentry, counseling and rehabilitation programs are available for them in their community can make a difference.

Most Black inmates people of color come from generational poverty. Living in low income housing, crime ridden neighborhoods and possessing little to no education can be addressed on a community level. An idea to intervene at a community level could involve interviews with local halfway houses and transitional living facilities staffs’ and ask, what kinds of programs are working best and which ones are not working for their clients; specifically, asking what programs (if any) do they have in place to reduce if not, eliminate, recidivism. Linking the ex-offender with specific services according to their specific need (s) empowers them to continue to grow at their own pace. Also, speaking with City and State leaders to promote “pardons” for those who qualify can encourage hope and self-sufficiency for the ex-offender which, will ultimately render the ex-offender to have a better outlook on life. Moreover, speaking to prominent clergy in these at risk communities and asking them what their thoughts are when they hear the term “Mass incarceration”. Getting them to listen and take the facts into account of how Mass incarceration ruin not only the individual but, their families and their communities.

## **Micro-Level Interventions**

Micro-level interventions are interferences working directly with an individual and a family. For the purpose of this paper, directly working with an ex-offender can be challenging due to the ex-offender's perspective on himself. A clinical intervention would consist of assessing how motivated the client is to change, and what are the barriers preventing this change to occur. A thorough assessment would include, his highest level of education completed, his attitude towards work, his living conditions, his support systems, and his openness to change.

In a study examining the process of psychological empowerment as it impacts the ex-offenders' self-sufficiency, 154 ex-offenders who were receiving services from a community-based organization in Chicago were surveyed. These services included: case management, budget assistance, economic empowerment, first-time home owners information, home management and housing advocacy, individual and family counseling, links to job services, tenant-landlord rights education, youth counseling, utility assistance, and education and medical referrals (Choi, Hong, & Lewis, 2014). Researchers investigated the relationships of self-esteem and self-efficacy on employment hope and employment hope on self-sufficiency, it was confirmed that employment hope was a facilitator between mental strength behaviors and self-sufficiency (Choi, Hong, & Lewis, 2014). Motivating and supporting ex-offenders to develop and sustain employment hope is crucial.

Despite the high rates of unemployment among ex-offenders, attention must be given to the contributing factors to demotivation for ex-offenders such as, discrimination. It is estimated that the percentage of males with criminal backgrounds between the ages of 18 and 45 is more than 70% (Choi, Hong, & Lewis, 2014). Additionally, unemployment rates are greater than 50%

among the formerly incarcerated and 75% post 1-year from release (Choi, Hong, & Lewis, 2014).

### **Meta-Micro Level Interventions**

Meta-micro levels interventions relates to everyday life encounters (Wronka, 2017). When thinking of how to enhance meta-micro levels interventions, one could evaluate how they relate to family, friends, neighbors and strangers. Meta-micro interventions can be thought of as being as humanly kind as possible. This level of intervention can be challenging since you never know how the other person would respond to your kind gestures. However, while doing an assessment with a client, asking them about their strengths and giving them genuine praise can make a person feel important (Wronka, p. 132, 2017).

No matter what at risk population one is working with, praise and capitalizing off of someone's strengths goes a long way. While interning at a facility for ex-offenders, I remember telling some who were convicted for drug dealing how they are natural entrepreneurs' with extraordinary customer service skills. There are several testimonies of ex drug dealers who have opened clothing stores and restaurants because someone encouraged them for their business sense. Author Dale Carnegie (1981) mentions how making a fault seem easy to correct through liberal encouragement and praise for what they have and wish to accomplish, gives a person hope.

Another meta-micro intervention for ex-offenders is letting them know the cold truth that society has set-up barriers for them to recover and get on with their lives. Letting them know that "paying their debt to society" is a myth; and as unfortunate as it is, an ex-offender in society's viewpoint, is most likely someone who cannot be trusted. Giving an ex-offender this cold hard truth can seem disheartening yet, it could be empowering.

According to research, non cognitive transformations can help these individuals understand that they can be trusted. Non Cognitive interventions enhance positive character traits such as: mental toughness, trustworthiness, tenacity, and persistence (Choi, Hong, & Lewis, 2014). Researchers concluded this approach empowers ex-offenders to rebuild trust in themselves and put them on a journey of realizing their goals.

Finally, as Wronka (2017) puts it, meta-micro interventions includes: random acts of kindness, being in-touch with your spirituality, performing virtuous deeds, saying hello, giving someone a genuine compliment, being of good comradery have therapeutic effect.

## **7. Qualitative and Quantitative Research**

According to Wronka (2017), numerical methods of finding data, primarily through measurement and operationalization of variables, is often referred to as quantitative research. Eliciting findings through meaningful dialogue and rigorous conversation is often called qualitative research. Wronka (2017), continues to state that quantitative research is often concerned with method, manipulation, and control of variables, works with individual subjects, and generalizes data to the broader population. Qualitative research is phenomenon bound rather than methodologically centered, seeks understanding and meaning rather than loyalty to a system, and works with co-researchers (Moustakas, 1990). Both quantitative and qualitative research can be used to address the policy issue of mass incarceration in various ways. There have been multiple qualitative and quantitative studies which researchers have conducted that have explored various ways to address the social and policy issue of mass incarceration.

When addressing mass incarceration, researchers have used qualitative studies to gain insight on the perspectives and experiences of those affected tremendously by mass incarceration. Many

researchers have visited inmates who are incarcerated as well as completed interviews and surveys with family members whose loved ones are incarcerated. Some of these qualitative studies conducted by researchers have assisted helping professionals with coming up with interventions that can help address the issue of mass incarceration such as creating agencies that assist families who have been impacted by the criminal justice system (Turanovic, Rodriguez & Pratt, 2012). There are many quantitative studies that have measured and explored the effectiveness of incarceration as well as criminal justice systems. Quantitative studies have also measured the effectiveness of programs that have been put in place to help decrease the amount of individuals in the criminal justice system. Many of the interventions that have been put in place for the meta-macro, macro, mezzo, micro and meta-micro levels can benefit primarily from qualitative research studies in the sense that experiences and voices of individuals impacted are continuously noted. As stated previously, qualitative research has a focus on speaking with different individuals and understanding their personal experiences relating to the study of research. Mass incarceration is becoming an increasing policy issue and many researchers are using qualitative research as a means to understand the perspectives of individuals affected directly by it. Caretakers of children whose parents or guardians are incarcerated is an area that is not being addressed. Being able to address what the positive and negative consequences of the implications incarceration has on all parties involved, including family members, allows researchers to assist in interventions that could be put in place to deal with mass incarceration on the meta-macro level. In particular, there are qualitative studies that have addressed the role caretakers of children whose parents are incarcerated play and how they are affected directly by the issue.

Turanovic, Rodriguez & Pratt (2012), found in their study titled: “The Collateral Consequences of Incarceration Revisited: A Qualitative Analysis of the Effects on Caregivers of Children of Incarcerated Parents”, that there are both positive and negative consequences that occur for caregivers of children when a parent is incarcerated. Turanovic, Rodriguez & Pratt (2012), found that family members who are affected by mass incarceration include single mothers, single fathers, grandparents, other family members and even friends. This study continued to show that caregivers assume fundamental roles during a parent’s incarceration that can impact familial processes in various ways, and they may shape profoundly not only children’s experiences with parental imprisonment but also children’s relationships with their parents. This study explored the difficulties that come along with a spouse being incarcerated. For those who are left behind with little resources, the imprisonment of a spouse may worsen their situation since these individuals have to assume additional roles and responsibilities in the prisoner’s absence (Gleeson et al., 2009; Nurse, 2004). The study by Turanovic, Rodriguez & Pratt (2012) found that these added strains can negatively affect familial processes and often are compounded when children are involved.

Over the last four decades, American policy makers have generally assumed that imprisoning offenders—even via the method of mass incarceration that the American experience has morphed into—is a good thing (Bennett, DiIulio, and Walters, 1996). The most vocal policy pundits proclaim that offenders are bad people, lousy spouses, deadbeat parents, and unreliable employees (if employed at all), and therefore, their removal from their respective communities should result in a net benefit to society (see, e.g., the discussions by Gest, 2001; Pratt, 2009; Tonry, 1995). This study explored all viewpoints of individuals affected by mass incarceration. The purpose of this study was to shed light on the variability in the collateral consequences of

incarceration for families and children so that we may better understand— both theoretically and empirically—the full set of social outcomes associated with the experience of incarceration, Turanovic, Rodriguez & Pratt (2012). The study concluded that research focusing on marginalized women left behind shows that such women must typically rely on friends and family members to provide money, child care, and companionship in their partner's absence (Carlson and Cervera, 1992; Clear, 2007). The incarceration of a parent also can initiate a series of unanticipated difficulties, as caregivers may be forced to change residences with children because of financial strains (Kampfner, 1995; Phillips et al., 2006; Tasca, Rodriguez, and Zatz, 2011) and may struggle to maintain employment, all while attempting to exert adequate controls over children's behavior (Green et al., 2006; Harm and Thompson, 1995; Sabol and Lynch, 2003).

All of the findings of this study suggest that there needs to be interventions put in place to combat the effects mass incarceration has on its families who are not incarcerated. There are strains that are put on family members and from the Advanced Generalist Perspective, providing services on all levels are imperative to combat the issue of mass incarceration. This study showed that there is a need for implementing services and programs that directly assist caretakers of children who are incarcerated. This quantitative study can benefit and assist interventions that were discussed previously for both the mezzo and meta-macro level. The common theme of this qualitative study were that positive and negative consequences are important in exploring mass incarceration. In relation to the interventions that could be put into place, understanding different viewpoints can give insight on how to directly approach the issue of mass incarceration. In many cases, these individuals get overlooked and the way they are affected goes unnoted.



Although qualitative studies have been done on the effects of mass incarceration, quantitative studies have also been helpful as well. There are theories explaining the effects of incarceration on communities that are both positive and negative effects. Some assume a very direct effect of incarceration on social control, whereas others assume that detrimental effects of incarceration occur through the negative impact on institutions such as family (Lynch & Sabol, 2004). Research suggests that incarcerating individuals can have negative consequences for their future labor force participation and their future earnings (Lynch & Sabol, 2004). Attachments to the labor force, families, communities and other groups make inmates vulnerable to additional informal sanctions from these groups as a result of incarceration. The principal assumed benefit of incarceration has been crime reduction through incapacitation or deterrence. Beneficial effects of imprisonment were believed to occur because the offender was simply removed from society (Marvel and Moody 1994, 1998). Braman's (2002) ethnographic work with families of incarcerated men in Washington, D.C. describes how the stigma of incarceration felt by the immediate family members of the incarcerated offender can weaken extended family ties. Braman (2002), continues to suggest that immediate family members feel the stigma of incarceration and because of that they lie or do not talk about the incarceration of their loved one.

Lynch and Sabol (2003) found that there were positive consequences of mass incarceration. Lynch and Sabol state, "Although there has been extensive work linking the social organization of communities to crime (Taylor, 2001, 1999, 1986; Taylor et al., 1984; Sampson et al. 1997) there is virtually no theory or empirical work that associates imprisonment directly with building or supporting less coercive institutions of social control." Lynch and Sabol (2003) continued to state that "most of the beneficial effects of incarceration are expected to occur through crime reduction."

From the study conducted by Lynch and Sabol (2003), there are more negative consequences of incarceration versus positive consequences which can relate to interventions that could be put in place to address the issue. Lynch and Sabol (2003) pointed out that “there are various routes and processes by which incarceration can adversely affect communities.” Darity and Myers (1989, 1994), Myers (2000), Lynch and Sabol (1992), and Sabol and Lynch (2003) speculated that incarceration would reduce the marriageability of men and thereby reduce marriage formation. This, in turn, would increase the number of female-headed households in areas with high incarceration and ultimately crime rates because of the absence of supervision for young males in these areas (Sampson, 1987). Incarceration can weaken families by removing men from existing families and by reducing the supply of marriageable men, which thereby reduces family formation. Removal through incarceration can also affect economic institutions in communities by removing people who bring money to families and to the community. In the long run, incarceration will have the negative effects on the economic life of the community by reducing the ability of returning inmates to obtain jobs and higher salaries.

Lynch and Sabol (2003) concluded in their study that assessing the impact of incarceration on primary controls in residential communities would benefit from a study of families that included both those that experienced incarceration and those similarly situated that had not. This quantitative study coincided with the qualitative studies in the sense that familial supports must be explored to help family members who are also affected by mass incarceration. Although quantitative approaches are highly effective, qualitative approaches are important for the public participation in the policy debates. Qualitative studies can also explore the perspectives of those affected by mass incarceration and how to address the problem. For the purpose of this policy project, three individuals were interviewed to explore the positive and

negative consequences of mass incarceration. After interviewing three different individuals who all held different roles within the criminal justice system, a common theme was noted.

For the purpose of this study, all names of individuals who were interviewed are to remain confidential. Interviews that were conducted included voices from a probation officer, parole officer and correctional officer. Ethic consent forms were developed and signed. Each individual received a 5-dollar gift card to Dunkin Donuts. When interviewing these individuals, a common theme was noted. All three of these individuals directly work with people who are incarcerated. The common theme was that more preventative programs need to be put in place to help combat the issue of mass incarceration. These individuals emphasized that providing employment and vocational training to individuals who were incarcerated is also very important. One probation officer stated that “One issue that seems to continue to be a problem is finding employment for individuals who have felony records. Creating job opportunities for them will help them stay in society and not return back to jail.” A parole officer of 20 years stated that “Criminal justice agencies should work with HUD to develop housing opportunities for individuals who have been incarcerated will be helpful, because many felons are not able to receive housing because of their criminal records.” Changing laws on convictions and reducing sentencing was also a common similarity that was noted while interviewing these individuals.

In conclusion, there were no dissimilarities in interviewing all three of these individuals. They all held the same idea that creating preventative programs can help eliminate mass incarceration. Having an idea of how people working in criminal justice agencies helps bring different perspectives on how mass incarceration can be addressed. Many of their voices go unheard so this interview helped show that workers in criminal justice agencies see that mass incarceration is an ongoing policy issue. Utilizing their input and the studies that researchers

have conducted can be very beneficial in addressing mass incarceration. Implementing preventative programs and focusing on children and families who are affected by loved ones being incarcerated can help with the issue of mass incarceration.

## 8. Ground Rules

All of the ground rules presented in the Human Rights and Social Justice Book (Wronka 2017, Chapter 6), are relevant to creating social action relating to mass incarceration. There are three specific ground rules that stand out:

The ground rule, “It is important to adopt a spirit of compassion for the other and to be wary of creating evil images” (Wronka, 2017). This statement and rule can be used on behalf of both parties. Legislation that justifies mass incarceration might have reasoning behind why they support it. They may believe that they are a step closer to lowering crime. But the reality is that there is a negative social stigma that is tied to mass incarceration. Unfortunately, the groups that are targeted in mass incarceration are minorities; specifically African Americans. Americans have built biases that affect their perception of who is a “criminal” and “what a criminal looks like.” Compassion has lost its relevance in mass incarceration, as well as many other relevant social issues. In order to effectively create social action relevant to mass incarceration; it is important to find and spread compassion for those who are being incarcerated and to knock down those evil images that have been created. Evil images include and are not limited to the social stigma and even the aftermath of those who are released after incarceration. Inmates struggle to find employment after incarceration, which can lead to other difficulties such as family and financial stress. This can potentially lead to more crimes and the return to

incarceration. Education is key in spreading that spirit of compassion amongst others. It is also essential to tear down negative images that have been created by mass incarceration.

The ground rule, “It is important to keep an open mind.” (Wronka, 306.) There are currently many relevant social action projects that incorporate mass incarceration. One example of this is, Black Lives Matter.” There have been both positive and negative outcomes to this social action movement. Yet, those who have kept an open mind when working with this social action project and made it a social movement. There is still a lot to be done but it is good to know that a lot has been done thanks to those who have kept an open mind and continue to move forward.

The ground rule, “One must not be afraid of tackling ambiguity.” (Wronka, 306) Issue may not be as simple as they appear yet it is important to make wise decisions, no matter how difficult the circumstance may be. Mass Incarceration is an issue that is much more complex than what rises to the surface. There are other social issues that tie into it such as slavery, human rights and racism. The complexity of the issue should not bring fear when dealing with social action relating to mass incarceration.

## **9. Selected Social Actions**

The constraints that I see that prevents a just world for all people are the fact that there are individuals who are uneducated on the topic, and have no interest in helping to solve the problem. A majority of these individuals come from the high class. Their focus is to continue to stay in the high class, and not help contribute those in need below them. As mentioned in this paper, a lot of the African Americans who have been incarcerated come from low class environments. There are individuals in the higher class that has a mindset that if these individuals find a job, then they would not be getting arrested. They become ignorant of the fact that the

individuals who are getting arrested do not have the resources needed to help them stay out of the criminal justice system. I would have to figure out a way to communicate my disappointment in the way that African Americans and other disenfranchised groups are treated in this country. This topic hits home for me because I have friends and a few family members who I have lost to the criminal justice system due to a lack of resources. We need to get all environment properly funded. We need to take away stores that do more harm than good in our environments. Here in Springfield, you can find liquor stores, gun shops, and many abandoned buildings. You will not find too many or if not any liquor stores or gun shops in nearby suburban towns. The abandoned buildings can be used to start programs for disenfranchised groups to get home finding employment or other resources that they may need. Instead they are passed by every day, and in some cases vandalized by delinquents who have nothing else better to do with them because they are not involved in any programs that could have prevented them from getting involved in delinquent activities.

We can use technology to create a socially just world by posting statistics and sharing videos of the injustice that disenfranchise people go through here in the United States. Technology is more advanced now than it has ever been. With the advancement of smartphones, you can access resources and look up pretty much anything on the internet. As mentioned earlier in this paper, social media is used to get out a lot of the information that people want other people to know about. Social media is not just for regular individuals to use; you see major companies use social media to spread word about what they are advertising or what they want people to know about. Technology can help when we go looking for available and accessible services for the individuals that we are advocating for. We can use our phones or tablets to access websites that will let us know when and where different programs are going on that may spread

awareness or give insight on what we can do as a community to help prevent or potentially end the social injustice.

Mass incarceration has been an ongoing issue for over 10 years. Social workers can assist to affect change in regards to mass incarceration in a few ways. This includes developing organizations, coming together as a team, and being able to motivate people who are affected by mass incarceration to take a stance. In discussing mass incarceration, it is essential that people continue to fight for social justice, equality and freedom from discrimination.

In February 2016, a Justice initiative was developed in Middletown, Connecticut to end mass imprisonment. The Malta Justice Initiative (MJII) has developed a plan with a goal to end mass imprisonment in Connecticut. It acknowledges that Connecticut incarcerates more citizens than 65 countries around the world, including Mexico, Cuba, Rwanda and the Russian Federation. It also acknowledges that America incarcerates its citizens at a rate five times higher, 717 for every 100,000 residents, than any other country in the world by far (Middletown Interagency Action Committee, 2016). The MJII is a nonprofit whose mission is committed to ministering and advocating for the incarcerated. The nonprofit organization has 160 volunteers in the state and 13,000 worldwide who minister and advocate for the incarcerated and their families.

The Drug Intervention Program in Connecticut is a program whose two main goals are to decrease criminal behavior and to reduce substance abuse for those who take part in the intervention. (State of Connecticut 2002-2017). Referrals to the Drug Intervention Program may be made by judges, defense counsels, state's attorneys or intake, assessment and referral/ supervision officers.

The Alternative Incarceration Program is another program that is in agreement to end mass incarceration. Applicants can be placed in this program in lieu of serving jail time. The program usually includes an intensive probation program including community service hours, employment, psychiatric and psychological evaluation, drug and alcohol dependency treatment, and counseling. The program is run by the office of Adult Probation. The Youthful Offender Program (YO) is available to people charged with committing a crime prior to their eighteenth birthday (State of Connecticut 2002-2017). This program is not a pretrial diversionary program, but an alternative to prosecution as adults for such youths.

Another initiative is the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), which was founded in 1989 by Bryan Stevenson. This initiative is committed to ending mass incarceration and excessive punishment in the United States, to challenging racial and economic injustice, and to protecting basic human rights for the most vulnerable people in American society. EJI engages with communities that have been marginalized by poverty and discouraged by unequal treatment.

The Connecticut Juvenile Alliance (CTJJA) works to stop the criminalization of Connecticut's children and youth. Their goal is to reduce the amount of children entering the system, to treat children fairly and effectively and to be sustainable.

### **10. Conflicting values/ Ethical Issues**

Changing our judicial system and changing the views of society would profoundly make great strides in creating a socially just world for everyone. Though there are many black American men who are incarcerated for nonviolent crimes, there are those who have committed crimes that are rightfully warranted to serve time in a prison. According to Chettiar and Eisen (2015), the problem with our judicial system and why we have mass incarceration are first, there



are too many low-level offenders who should not be in prison at all, and second, that even those people who might warrant prison, are sent to prison for way too long. Still, there are conflicting values to consider.

On one hand, I feel like prisons are necessary for those who have committed violent crimes and who have put the public's safety at risk. However, the conflict within is, I'm not sure if we, the people, have the right to interrupt an individual's human rights to freedom; especially if we are not promoting self-actualization and treating our inmates with dignity and worth.

To that end, I feel like we are taking matters into our own hands when, there are several verses in the Bible that clearly tell us that God is the only one who has the right to punish us for our transgressions. For example, 1 Thessalonians 5:15 says, "See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone". As Wronka (2017) mentions, "the debate must always be human rights for every person, everywhere". Thus, there are ethical issues with mass incarceration.

Article 5 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights states, "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Wronka, 2017). For example, when an individual is put in prison, they subjected to torturous conditions such as, being locked in a tiny cell, where they have minimal to no contact with anyone, where they cannot freely read and write, and are allowed out of their cell just once a day for solo recreation (Gopnik, 2012).

Writing a grant to end mass incarceration may be a tenacious feat; however, it can be done with patience and determination. Writing a grant for this issue would definitely include qualitative and quantitative statistics. Having statistics and personal testimonies of the problem

as it relates to these individuals having lived experiences with oppression from our judicial system; would hopefully yield a major shift in the way we prosecute individuals for non-violent acts of crime. The grant would also include an intervention. For example, Oklahoma prison program called TASK is a program whom President Obama has praised and says, it should be implemented elsewhere to prevent at-risk children from committing crimes and going to prison. Another section the grant would include would be administration and staffing along with a budget. For example, I would include the organization's mission statement and vision, titles of those working on this project, their salary requirements. I would also include a time frame to demonstrate pre and post assessments of the intervention.

In order to find available resources for those who are affected by mass incarceration, I would have to use the internet to research what resources are working to improve the lives of individuals who have been convicted of a non-violent. For example, some public libraries offer vocational skills training as well as assistance with pardon's applications. I would definitely advocate for low-cost to free education for ex-offenders. To that end, whether you were convicted of a drug charge would be eliminated from Financial-Aid applications.

These social actions are a start but, does have their constraints. For instance, it takes time, money, dedication and an open mind to write a grant. As Wronka (2017) mentions, having an open mind is important in case the grant is not funded, "one should take joy for the attempt is priceless".

Overall, with the conditions of our prisons, they are certainly setup for one to be stripped of their human rights. We, as a Nation, need to send a strong message that prisoners and/or ex-offenders aren't monsters, they're human beings just like each and every one of us; who are entitled to human rights as well.

## **11. Relevant Policy Initiatives**

**LOCAL:** In 2016, Hampden County began operating an adult-drug court located in Springfield, MA. The commencement of operation was also a culmination of the work of many local individuals, organizations, and political players. The Pioneer Valley Project (PVP) and Jobs Not Jails (JNJ) are two examples of local organizations who have worked tirelessly for the opening of the drug court, seeing it as a vital step in decreasing the number of individuals entering the criminal justice system for non-violent offenses. PVP is a faith-based coalition organization comprised of over 80 affiliates. These collaborators include religious institutions, organized labor unions, and other progressive organizations (pvp.org). Jobs Not Jails, is a Massachusetts organization with over 60 co-sponsors whose goals include: gaining a moratorium on all construction of new prisons, repealing mandatory minimum sentences, repealing Registry of Motor Vehicles sanctions, and funding education in prisons. Ultimately, Jobs Not Jails seeks to redirect the money used to fund prisons and shift it to instead fund job training, creation, and placement for Massachusetts residents. Although, Jobs Not Jails is not a legislative organization, it is an umbrella campaign, working to galvanize other smaller organizations work into a unified movement (Jobs not jails, 2017). [MASS.GOV](http://MASS.GOV), check JNJ and PVP websites too for citation, )

**STATE:** At the state level, Massachusetts has worked with the Council of State Governments (CSG), a national nonprofit focused on providing nonpartisan advice and evidence-based policy suggestions for combatting incarceration rates and recidivism. Massachusetts already has one of the lowest rates of incarceration in the country, but the recidivism rate is concerning. Massachusetts Governor, Charlie Baker along with a twenty-five member team worked with the CSG over the course of two years to study and devise proposed solutions for

combatting this recidivism as well as continuing to lower the number of people in prisons and jails in the Commonwealth (SITE CSG website).

As a result of the findings of this study, versions of the Justice Reinvestment Act have been introduced in both the Senate and the House of Representatives, SB64 and HB1429, respectively, will be up for deliberation and voting during the 2017 legislative session. The major components include: Ending mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent drug-related offenses; Changing the threshold for felony theft from \$250 [one of the lowest in the country] to \$1000; Increasing funding for reentry programs after incarceration and for job training and education during incarceration; Reducing the number of years for sealing past incarceration records from Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) checks from the current ten years for felonies and five years for misdemeanors, down to seven years for felonies and three years for misdemeanors; and, Increasing the likelihood that juveniles can have their records officially expunged upon turning 18. This work has been largely bipartisan.

**NATIONAL:** There has been a trend in recent years, during the last presidential administration and a continuation in the current administration, towards a criminalization of immigration. Policy shifts have put pressure on local and state law enforcement agencies to comply with federal mandates enforcing immigration law. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the government agency housed under the Department of Homeland Security, generally tasked with enforcing immigration, saw a budget increase of 25% during the 2016 funding cycle (Department of Homeland Security, 2016) As politicians look to find scapegoats to blame for slow economic growth and continued economic hardships, as well as place to cast blame for crime, the narrative centers on immigrants and refugees. Huge detention centers have been built along the United States southern border and are used to jail entire families caught

illegal emigrating or living within the United States. Many of these prisons are for profit facilities with contracts guaranteeing they have a certain percentage of beds filled at all times. (DuVernay, 2016). Cities and towns who choose to ignore or refuse to cooperate risk losing federal funding.

Another, more heartening trend, can be found in the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare's 12 Grand Challenges for Social Work these challenges are “a groundbreaking initiative to champion social progress powered by science...a call to action...to work together to tackle our nation’s toughest social problems.” (American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare (AASWSW), 2017) One of the Grand Challenges is to “Promote Smart Decarceration.” (AASWSW, 2017) Smart Decarceration consists of not only accomplishing the end goal of drastically decreasing the number of Americans currently in the prison system but also of doing this in a just, equitable, and fair way. The authors of this working paper and builders of this movement assert that “there is no more pressing social justice issue in the United States today than effectively undoing mass incarceration and its wide-reaching effects”. Social workers are uniquely positioned and trained to engage with this work. The working group believes that decarceration involves not only preventing people from entering prisons, but “it involves developing an array of more effective and socially just alternatives to replace incarceration,” (AASWSW, 2017).

**INTERNATIONAL:** The most promising way to interact and affect meaningful change at an international level is through consistent work within the United Nations Human Rights Initiatives (CITE WRONKA...blah). Beginning on April 24, 2017 the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) will convene for its 92nd Session. CERD is the “body of [independent experts](#) that monitors implementation of the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#) by its State parties” (CITE UN). These conventions are important

because they provide a continual and consistent means of monitoring work that is being done within nation states. The United States should implement the recommendations given by CERD in order to more closely align its ideological positions and its actual policies governing behavior. In the United States groups such as the United States Human Rights Network act as intermediaries helping to disseminate relevant information from the International bodies to the American people (<http://www.ushrnetwork.org/events/2017-ushrn-member-calls>).

## **12. Constructing a Persuasive Argument**

A persuasive argument would be about building communities for disenfranchised groups. We need to put resources that individuals can go to when in need. African Americans who live in urban areas are not given the proper resources they need to survive. According to the Black Institute, American Americans are more than twice more likely to live in poverty than none (Black Institute). The lack of resources in the black community has black parents working multiple jobs to take care of their families. This leaves their children vulnerable to potential criminal activity if they are not in good child care. Child care is important for them to help the children understand how to be good citizens of the community. After-school programs are beneficial because it give the children the resources to maintain a social life, while getting help with school work if necessary. Making these after-school programs affordable is the key. The disenfranchised groups are already at a disadvantage and a lot are living in poverty, so if they cannot afford to send their children to after-school programs, then those individuals are at risk to get involved in criminal activity.

There has to be laws implemented to help disenfranchised groups to maintain jobs. “One preventive strategy against at-risk groups falling through the cracks and eventually becoming

homeless is to implement the right that everyone has to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests” (Wronka, Pg. 188). Individuals have to have sense of job security to prevent unwanted stress on their lives. Mothers-to-be should be able to get maternity leave with pay, and not have to worry about losing their job. This creates better working environments for the employees who are females. A lot of the women who worry about job security come from disenfranchised groups. There are people who worry about losing their jobs due to illness. This is an issue because people can no longer afford to get sick. They go into the workplace with these illnesses that are contagious because they are afraid that if they call out too many days then they will lose their jobs. Article 25 talks about people being able to have security regardless of if they are unemployed or not.

Building a community where everyone feels a part of it will take changes to certain laws and policy we currently have. One of those laws that need to be change is the access to health care. Everyone should have access to health care. It is not right that people are turned away from getting access to health resources due to not having health insurance. The ones who suffer the most of are our children. If the parents do not have health care, then the children do not. Children are not eligible to work, so the fact that they have to rely on their parents to have health care in order for them to have it is not right. Article 25 talks about everyone have the right to substantial medical care.

Individuals should have access to access to foods. There are soup kitchens here in Western Mass, but the issue is there is not a lot of food in these places. When people do get some sort of income at the beginning of the month, a lot of them go to the soup kitchens because it is either free or much cheaper than the grocery stores. The issue is when the soup kitchens run out of food; they have to turn people away. Soup kitchens should be funded by the government so

that people always have access to food. There are different circumstances where people may need to have access to a soup kitchen. There is no timetable of when a fire may happen or a flood, so in the event that disasters like that happens, individuals should be able to go to the soup kitchens to get food and not have to worry about whether the kitchen has food there or not. When individuals become desperate for food, they are at risk for committing crimes to obtain food. The crimes could be drug dealing in order to earn fast money to buy food, or they will go and steal it. The access of education for disenfranchised groups is important. When we look at the statistics of African Americans who are incarcerated, a lot of them do not have high levels of education. The public schools in urban areas are not up to par as suburban schools. There are many issues within the urban schools that need to be properly addressed. Teachers are burnt out due to the size of their class and the behaviors of a lot of the students. Students come to school with different issues that they deal with outside of school whether it is peer relationships or problems going on at home, and they are expected to pay full attention while they are in class. Some students may not understand the workload that they are given, so they misbehave in class in order to get removed, so that their classmates are unaware of the struggles that they are having with their schoolwork. There are schools that do not have enough support services available for the students and staff. There are schools with one or two adjustment counselors, but if the school has over 700 hundred students, one or two counselors are not going to be to support everyone in need. These school issues leads to a lot of drop-out rates in urban areas due to the students not feeling supported. If students are not supported at home whether it is due to their parents never being home due to work or they are out getting involved in drug activity, then it will be hard for them to believe that a teacher who is consistently removing them from class is interested in their success.



In addition to getting rid of the many negative contributors to low income communities, programs that do exist have to do a better job of promoting their cause. Through research, it has been discovered that there are a number of organizations in the city of Hartford that focuses on improve the quality of life for its residence. However, it is believed that people are unaware that these programs exist due the lack of promotion to low income families. Organizations such as the Connecticut Science Program, the Artist Collective, and the Blue Hills Civic Association (BHCA). All have programs within them that allows for families improve their living situations.

The Connecticut Science Center (CSC) has a program to help low income families. The program is the Women in Science program, which encourages young women to pursue careers as Scientist. This program is providing equity for minority women because they recognize there is a shortage of minority women in the field of science. The program provides direction for inner city women who are looking for a way out of tough living conditions. It surrounds them by professional scientist who meets with them throughout the year in hopes of keeping them focused on a profession that will allow them to provide a better life for themselves.

The Artist Collective is an organization in the upper Albany section of Hartford, Connecticut. It is designed to keep youth from engaging in crime by having programs installed to help youth discover their talents. In 2011 to 2015, the Hartford Courant discussed how there were 1,880 crimes committed in the upper Albany area of Hartford, CT. Leaders of this organization believe that by having this organization in this area of Hartford, it will help to reduce the crime rate in the upper Albany section of Hartford. Programs such as African art, African dance, and African music will help youths discover hidden talents that will keep their interest off negative influences within the community.

The BHCA mission is to empower residents and neighborhoods to become self sufficient through advocacy, organizing and services for the betterment of Hartford (Blue Hills Civic Association, 2015). They provide many programs such as housing, youth development, youth recreation, and outreach services. All created as a result of grassroots advocacy among parents, neighborhoods community leader and other stakeholders to better address community concerns such as safe neighborhoods and a say in the decision-making process of local government. This organization advocates for new parks and recreation services, educational, job training and violence prevention programs (Blue Hills Civic Association, 2015). Their outreach services include access to housing assistance, homeless prevention, community engagement on educational concerns, immigration services, and job readiness (resume writing, interview training, and job referrals).

These organizing provide positive resources for low income communities. These organizing have so much to offer but aren't doing well at promoting their services to the community. More promotion needs to happen in order to help crime rate to decrease. Which raises the question, "Are these programs, that are directed at the improving the quality of life, helping to decrease mass incarceration"? There has to be a greater effort aimed at promoting these programs so that more families will become aware of their existence. These programs, though very positive, should not be funded if they cannot show that they are showing some effect on equity, liberty, security, welfare, efficiency, or democracy.

### **13. Inducements, rules, facts, rights, powers**

There are several recommendations that can be put in place to deal with the policy issue of mass incarceration. The main recommendation to help eradicate the issue of mass

incarceration is to provide education to many at-risk populations as well as individuals who are incarcerated. In many cases, individuals who are incarcerated have not received their high school diploma or GED.

In many cases also, individuals who have a felony charge on their record are not allowed to receive financial aid to complete higher education. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 68% of state prison inmates did not receive a high school diploma. The Bureau of Justice Statistics continues to state that about 26% of state prison inmates said they had completed the GED while serving time in a correctional facility. By providing education to both individuals who are at risk of being incarcerated and those who have been incarcerated can help lower the recidivism rate (Pettit & Sykes (2015).

Another crucial recommendation to eradicate mass incarceration is providing housing and jobs to people who have been incarcerated. There are many inmates who have been released and have no clue on how to obtain a job or find housing. Some individuals with felony charges are not able to qualify for subsidized housing and this adds to the increasing amount of individuals incarcerated. By providing tools to help remain an active member of society such as housing opportunities and job opportunities can help eliminate the alarming amount of individuals incarcerated. Educating and providing services that help prevent individuals who are at risk of being incarcerated is also very important. There should be more programs that are implemented to serve as educators in communities where incarceration is more likely to affect individuals. This includes urban communities and at-risk communities.

Mentioned above are actions that can bring about positive social change to eradicate mass incarceration within a mezzo level. Dr. Wronka (2017) also acknowledges executive, legislative,

judicial, and public discourse movements to change societal attitudes towards mass incarceration. President Barack Obama was the first sitting president to visit a jail (Horsley, 2015).

President Barack Obama applauded an Oklahoma facility for its job training and educational opportunities but also noting, that there should be those kinds of institutional supports that should be available for kids and teenagers before they become a part of the judicial system (Horsley, 2015). More than often, black men are a missing figure in their household; leaving the single, struggling mother alone to raise her child the best way she can. Meanwhile, the poor black boy/girl looks for attention in all the wrong places and ultimately struggles to make the right choice for themselves especially with the media portraying the very neighborhoods they come from as drug-dealing, crime-ridden, and poor.

Dr. Wronka also comments how executive, legislative, and judicial movements are usually develop in response to how the public feels about the phenomenon. In regards to mass incarceration, there is doubt that the public will ever make a lot of noise about the punitive treatment ex-convicts receive during and after incarceration. Dr. Wronka (2017) mentions how rich kids come from rich neighborhoods to the poor ones to get their drugs.

This is the exact reason why our policies around drug-dealing convictions are way too harsh. Most of these rich kids/adults have parents who are very influential in their state. Some of their parents are judges, governors, senators, etc. As a group, we don't believe for one second, if Johnny or Sarah are strung out on drugs, stealing from their parents, overdosing and giving the family a bad name; would these parents fight to eradicate mass incarceration. To that end, the voices and policies of the rich are those that are heard. Thus, the government should create more

inducements with companies that can provide gainful employment for ex-offenders. For example, Stone, (2012) mentions in her book, “*Policy Paradox*” of a “Carrot and Stick” (p.271) metaphor. This metaphor can be summed up as incentives and sanctions. For example, offering incentives to companies to hire ex-offenders and pay them a livable wage is the example of the carrot. The other carrot in this example is the ex-offender who immediately recognizes himself as a valuable member of his family as well as a valuable member of his community. However, the “stick” of this metaphor is the sanction these companies would receive if they do not comply with the rule of hiring ex-offenders.

As Stone (2012) notes, “rules are the essential form of social coordination; the command people, organizations, and governments to act in certain ways”. Speaking of rules and keeping with the same example mentioned above, our government can legitimize a rule that states that all companies need to have at least 15% of ex-offenders employed and on their payroll. Our government should set a strong example that mass incarceration is indeed keeping vulnerable populations impoverished. The fact of this matter is that mass incarceration is a direct violation of human rights; being locked-up stagnates one's growth and development no matter what stage of life they're in. It is a human beings right to make mistakes and due to the UN declaration of Human Rights, as a Nation, it is our responsibility to forgive individuals of their trespasses.

#### **14. Social Action Strategies Outside of the Political Arena**

In Human Rights and Social Justice, Wronka cites the words of world renowned psychologist and philosopher Erich Fromm when stating that an “unlived life leads to destruction” (Wronka, 2017. p.53). Wronka continues, positing that violence should not be condoned and acknowledges the creation and maintenance of racist structures embedded

throughout the history of the United States. Drawing on this analysis one can conclude that the problem of mass incarceration in the United States will only be remedied and reversed through concerted efforts on multiple fronts (Wronka, 2017).

Wronka highlights the importance of qualitative research in providing a means for a researcher to engage with “great historical and other events that do not lend themselves to established approaches or categories” (Wronka 2015, p. 242). This is referred to as quaternary intervention. Incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people face stigma and stereotypes from multiple facets in society and are often misrepresented and misunderstood. Utilizing qualitative methods of research to carefully and thoughtfully engage with this population could provide valuable insight and means of helping to change the narrative of who is incarcerated in the United States, why, and for what (Pettus and Epperson, 2015).

Sharing one’s story, on a micro-level, can be cathartic and sharing many stories, on a mezzo or macro-level, can help to humanize a segment of the population that has far too often had its humanity taken away. As social workers, we must work to engage each other in creative dialogue (Wronka, 2015). Building a movement, through changing the way society speaks about and think about prisons and prisoners, as well as helping individuals develop a sense of self-efficacy, can work to limit stigma and change hearts and minds.

The intimate connection between poverty and likelihood of incarceration is highlighted in many studies (Wheelock & Uggen, 2015; Western & Pettit, 2010; Greenberg & Rosenheck, 2008). According to Wheelock and Uggen, more than fifty percent of incarcerated persons lived at or below the poverty line in the year previous to their arrest and upon release male prisoners can expect to see their annual income decrease by a staggering forty percent (Western & Pettit, 2002; Wheelock & Uggen, 2005).

In light of these sobering facts, working towards economic equity, as well as combatting emotional neglect, could help to ameliorate the problem. Gerson and Van Soest, look to Gandhian principles to advocate for social change. Gandhi advocated for the “realization of the maximum potential by every human being” and believed that equality spread beyond social value committing to an “equality [within]... the economic system” (Gerson & Van Soest, p.12). Working to provide economic access and means to all would promote equity and thereby decrease incarceration.

Martin Luther King Jr. is often quoted referring to an idea called the “beloved community” and advocating that “hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that” (“Loving your Enemies,” AJ Muste, n.d.). Mass Incarceration, especially if viewed through the framework of being the “New Jim Crow” (Alexander, 2010) is an issue which is so hurtful, degrading, dehumanizing, and hateful that as people working for justice it is hard not to hate it and despise the people who have constructed and continue to perpetuate it. Yet, as we are reminded hate cannot change things, only love can.

Building a beloved community through authentic and affirming interactions and by supporting those most impacted by mass incarceration in their movements to dismantle the system are just as vital as political actions. In chapter seven of Human Rights and Social Justice, Wronka states that “direct nonviolent social action might be necessary to implement human rights principles, thereby creating a human rights culture” (Wronka, 2017). Learning about and supporting movements and organizations such as Black Lives Matter, Showing Up for Racial Justice, joining a local Racial Justice Task Force, or an enrichment group working to help support those most impacted is an imperative for all working towards social justice.

## **15. Annotated Bibliography**

Alexander, M. (2012) *The new Jim Crow, mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness*. New York, New York: The New Press

Michelle Alexander describes how mass incarceration undermines the civil rights movements and how white privilege still exist today.

American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare. (2017). 12 Great Challenges for Social Work. Retrieved from: <http://aaswsw.org/grand-challenges-initiative/12-challenges/>

While much of the research surrounding mass incarceration can seem overwhelming to someone who wants to change the system, there is hope. Social workers have a unique ability to see the mechanisms of oppression and can work together in their communities to effect long-lasting change. This resource outlines specific social action measures that social workers can do in order to effectively reduce the rates of incarceration and recidivism in their communities.

Averick, S., Barish, H., DuVernay, A., (Producers) & DuVernay, A. (Director). (2016). 13th [Documentary]. United States: Netflix.

*13th* is a documentary that is part of a civil movement to end mass incarceration. DuVernay interviewed some stalwarts of the Civil Rights era (Angela Davis) and also current agitators, lawmakers, and community activists.

Bonzcar, T. (2003). Prevalence of Imprisonment in the U.S. population, 1974-2001. *Bureau of Justice Statistics*.

This is a reputable, well-respected source of finding out information about the demographic data related to incarceration. It goes into depth discussing the demographic data of those incarcerated, such as race and gender, as well as extrapolates the data to find



the likelihood a member of a particular race will be incarcerated over the course of a lifespan. Rather than being a snapshot in time, this looks at how incarceration rates across many different groups have changed over time, which allows people to see the effects certain policies may or may not have caused in the rates of incarceration.

Bibas, S. (2015, September 15) The truth about mass incarceration. The National Review. Retrieved on January 31, 2017, from <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/424059/mass-incarceration-prison-reform>

Bibas examines some of the causes for mass incarceration; noting the shared views of President Obama and Michelle Alexander. He also mentions the disconnection between families when one is incarcerated. Bibas correspondingly recounts the difference in how people were punished centuries ago and now.

Carson, A. (2014). Prisoners in 2013. Retrieved on March 1, 2017 from <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p13.pdf>

This research conducted under the auspices of the United States Department of Justice's Bureau of Statistics collects national data regarding the numbers of people in prison currently, as well as trends over time. The focus of this research is mostly federal prisons.

Choi, S., Hong, P.Y.P., Lewis, D. (2014). Employment hope as an empowerment pathway to self-sufficiency among ex-offenders. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*. DOI: 10.1080/0509674.2014.922156

This research examined the process of psychological empowerment as it relates to ex-offenders' self-sufficiency. This transformational process of social inclusion involves the developing employment hope as one strives for economic success. This study

confirms previous studies that suggest a renewed focus on employment hope for comprehensively supporting ex-offenders' successful transition to self-sufficiency.

Department of Homeland Security. (2016). Budget-in-brief: Fiscal year 2016. Retrieved from [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/FY\\_2016\\_DHS\\_Budget\\_in\\_Brief.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/FY_2016_DHS_Budget_in_Brief.pdf)

The budget of a country is a good indicator of the priorities of that country. Therefore, in order to determine where the priorities of the United States are, it is important to note which programs are given increased funding and which are cut. The increase of funding to police the people within the borders of the United States sends a message that keeping people out of the country is more important than bringing them in.

Eisenhower, D. (1953). Chance for Peace. *Miller Center of Public Affairs*. Retrieved March 3, 2017, from: <http://archive.millercenter.org/president/eisenhower>.

It is tempting to believe that a desire for more equitable treatment for the working class is a revolutionary or radical idea. However, these ideas are often not nearly as recent as people would like to believe. Such is the case with the idea that the Military-Industrial Complex makes up far too much of the American economy. Former United States president Dwight D. Eisenhower believed that every bomb made is theft from the poor, which means this idea is at least 50 years old.

Gerson, D., & Van Soest, D. (1999). Relevance of Ghandi to a peaceful and just world society: lessons for social work practice and education. *New Global Development, 15*, 8-22.

This article identifies the way that Gandhi's teachings and beliefs are still relevant to social work practice today. This framework is useful in examining policies from a Gandhian perspective.

Gopnik, A. (2012, January 30) The caging of America (why do we lock up so many people?).

The

New Yorker. Retrieved on April 4, 2017, from

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/01/30/the-caging-of-america>

This author discusses the differences between the Bill of Rights and the Declaration of Human Rights as it relates to mass incarceration.

Greenberg, G.A., & Rosenheck, R.A., (2008). Jail incarceration, homelessness, and mental health:

A national study. *Psychiatric Services*, 59. 170-177

This study sought to investigate the rates and correlation of homelessness, especially mental illness, among adult prison inmates.

Haney, C. (2001). The psychological impact of incarceration: Implications for post-prison adjustment. *United States Department of Public Health*. Retrieved from:

<https://aspe.hhs.gov/basic-report/psychological-impact-incarceration-implications-post-prison-adjustment>

In order to be able to effectively assess whether or not there are any human rights violations occurring towards people who are in the prison system, it is important to gain an understanding of what it is like to be incarcerated in an American prison today. This research paper effectively summarizes the literature surrounding incarceration in such a way that produces a cohesive narrative. According to the author, the research has shown that being incarcerated often causes psychological trauma and harm that makes reintegration into society challenging for those who are released from prison.

Homeland Security. (2015). Fact Sheet: Department of Homeland Security Fiscal Year 2016

Budget. Retrieved February 15, 2017, from

<https://www.dhs.gov/news/2015/02/02/fact-sheet-dhs-fy-2016-budget>

Found information about the increase in the Department of Homeland Security 2016 budget (25% increase in 2016 from 2015).

Justice Reinvestment in Massachusetts - Policy Framework. (2017). Retrieved March 1, 2017,

from [https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/FINAL\\_JC\\_Justice-Reinvestment-in-Massachusetts\\_3.21.17.pdf](https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/FINAL_JC_Justice-Reinvestment-in-Massachusetts_3.21.17.pdf)

Local policy initiatives in Massachusetts, including the SB 64 and HB 1469, would mandate significant changes to the state's current policies. These include the lessening of time required to seal CORI records, to change the monetary threshold for felony theft from \$250 to \$1000, and allowing for the sealing of minors records and expungement of their records when they turn 18. This is a bipartisan bill that is supported by the Governor Charlie Baker a Republican as well as Senate President Stan Rosenberg a Democrat and many other Democrats.

King, M. L., Jr. . (April 4, 1967). *Beyond Vietnam- A Time to Break Silence*. Speech presented in

Riverside Church, New York.

This speech was where civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr.. began to publicly make the connection between the United States as the “greatest purveyor of violence” connecting the three greatest evils “racism, militarism, and poverty.” Many people feel that this speech put a target on King’s back resulting in his assassination exactly one year later.

Pettus-Davis, C., & Epperson, M. W. (2015). From mass incarceration to smart decarceration

(Grand Challenges for Social Work Initiative Working Paper No. 4). *American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare*.

Given the current political climate, it is important to be able to understand the role that social workers can play in order to dismantle the inequalities in our system. The American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare outlines specific challenges for the profession to ameliorate social ills facing the United States.

UN General Assembly. (1965). International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. *United Nations, Treaty Series 600*

Although the United Nations has outlined specific rights for all peoples in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, there are particular areas that need special attention that are common across many cultures. In this case, the United Nations outlined specific protections that should be granted to people of differing races. Since the focus on this paper is largely looking at the overrepresentation of people of color in the American prison system, it is important to have a clear understanding of what specific rights and protections the United Nations believes all people are entitled to in order to receive fair and equitable treatment.

McLeod, S. A. (2016). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Retrieved from [www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html](http://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html)

This resource breaks down the original formulation of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in a format that is easy to understand, as well as connects additional research to further expand on Maslow's original idea. This perspective understanding human needs as being broader than simply providing food, water and shelter is important to understanding the needs of humans in the prison system. In this perspective, it is not enough to merely keep incarcerated persons alive, but that it is the prison's

responsibility to nurture an environment that will allow the person to grow and develop at a more advanced level. In fact, it should be the goal of society as a whole to produce citizens who are fully self-actualized, or using their full potential, and this is no different for people who are incarcerated.

Norton, B. (2016, October 7) Scathing U.N. report: structural racism endures in the U.S., and the government has failed to protect the rights of African- Americans' rights. Retrieved from

<http://www.salon.com/2016/10/07/scathing-u-n-report-structural-racism-endures-in-u-s-and-the-government-has-failed-to-protect-african-americans-rights/>

This article parleys the whole phenomenon of Mass Incarceration especially from a structural racism viewpoint. Norton comments how structural racism is not only seen in mass incarceration but also in police brutality, extreme poverty, and drastically inequitable access to resources and social services. He also adds that most blacks are disproportionately affected by structural racism and how mass incarceration is considered a system of racial control which operates in a similar way like the Jim Crow laws once operated.

Obama, B.H., *The President's Role in Advancing Criminal Justice Reform*, 130 Harvard Law Review.(2017),<https://harvardlawreview.org/2017/01/the-presidents-role-in-advancing-criminal-justice-reform/>.

Before leaving office in 2017, President Obama offered commentary on the state of the United States Criminal Justice System. He offered his own work and accomplishments as an invitation to further change the way the prison system operates in the United States.

Pettit, B., & Sykes, B. L. (2015). Civil rights legislation and legalized exclusion: mass

incarceration and the masking of inequality. *Sociological Forum*.

DOI:10.1111/socf.12179

This article talks about legislature laws that were put in place to protect the Rights of Blacks. In addition, how household surveys excluded that the addresses the same laws that were put in place years ago and still addressing the same issues that were heightened in the early 1960's. Furthermore, this article addresses how some particular people were purposefully excluded from the survey. The article is conducive to this research as it discusses how black men who are currently or was an inmate is still being denied their civil rights.

Santos, M. (2013.) Mass incarceration: a great social injustice. The Huffington Post.

Retrieved on January 31, 2017, from

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-santos/mass-incarceration\\_b\\_2706215.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-santos/mass-incarceration_b_2706215.html)

This article discusses how laws and policies contribute to Mass Incarceration. Santos also accounted for his experience in the criminal justice system and goes on to say after serving 25 years in prison and how he continued to be confined to the criminal justice system by first, serving time in a half-way house, then, serving time on home confinement and last, serving several years on supervised release.

Sayers, S. (2014). *Mass incarceration & people of color*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York, NY.

This is a seminal work regarding the issue of mass incarceration, specifically as it relates to people of color. It gives a wide range of information on the topic, making it useful to understand and process the research that has been conducted on this issue.

Stone, D. (2012). *“Policy Paradox, The Art of Political Decision Making”*. W.W. Norton &

Company, Inc.

The book discusses the struggle over policy values and ideas. Stone explains the paradoxes that underlie policy decisions.

[Supernegromaniac]. (2011). *Cornel West: Justice is What Love Looks Like in Public*. [Video File].

Retrieved from: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGqP7S\\_WO6o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGqP7S_WO6o).

Cornel West is a eminent speaker on issues of race relations and racism. This speech he gave discusses how he defines what love looks like in public.

13th Amendment to the U.S Constitution. (n.d). Retrieved on January 30, 2017 from Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/13thamendment.html>

The Thirteenth amendment to the United State constitution abolished slavery, which had far-reaching effects for African-Americans. In order to properly grasp the effects of it, the specific wording of the amendment and the date it was instituted were important, as well as specific statistics surrounding the amendment.. The Library of Congress is the official repository of all official United States documents.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2007) State & county Quickfacts: Allegany County, N.Y.

Department of Justice of Public Affairs.

This was used in order to collect useful information regarding the demographic area of Allegany County, New York.

Wagner, P. & Rabuy, B. (2016). Mass incarceration: The whole pie. (March, 14 2016).

Retrieved

on March 2, 2017 from <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2016.html>.



Based out of Northampton, MA, the Prison Policy Initiative is a national leader in the research on effects of mass incarceration on individuals and communities. While the statistics it provides are mostly national, rather than local, it is often cited by many other online resources.

Western, B. & Pettit, B. (2010). Incarceration & social inequality. *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences*. 8-20.

This study demonstrates that social inequality is linked to an increased likelihood to be incarcerated. Therefore, it is necessary to change the system to reduce social inequality, so that rates of incarceration are more equitable.

Wheelock, D., & Uggen, C. (2008). Punishment, crime, and poverty. In *The Colors of Poverty : Why Racial and Ethnic Disparities Persist* (pp. 261-292). Russell Sage Foundation.

This article presents facts about poverty levels of people in the year prior to going to jail. This shows a clear connection between poverty and committing crime. This likely means that poverty is a serious motivating factor for those who commit crimes. Instead of merely punishing these people, it is likely more systematic changes throughout our society are needed to eliminate poverty, and therefore, reduce crime.

Wronka, J. (2017). Human Rights and Social Justice: Social Action and Service for the Helping and Health Professions. *SAGE Publications, Inc*.

This resource is absolutely instrumental for offering a framework by which to analyze the structures that make up society.

### **16. Ameliorating Mass Incarceration**

In regards to what we have done during this time to ameliorate mass incarceration has taken place on a meta-micro level. For instance, one of the group members bought a bunch of

hamburgers and a box of coffee from McDonald's and walked through an urban neighborhood offering a hamburger and a cup of coffee to some underserved members in their community. The group member simply asked "what can I and/or your government do for you"? And then, she listened. This group member quickly learned these individuals were hopeless in the government helping them.

Additionally, the group member imagined herself writing a book one day. To that end, it is her hopes to write a book and title it, "*I'm not a Monster*"; giving accounts of people who have been through our criminal justice system and how their lives had/have been affected by incarceration. This group member can also write a poem and submit it to *The Huffington Post*.

Moreover, there are lots of anonymous groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Gambling Anonymous, Sex Anonymous; so, why not start a group and call it Ex-offenders Anonymous – where people can come together and share their stories of strength, encouragement, hope and of course networking with one another for not only healthy relationships but networking to help in their search for gainful employment.

We have incorporated restorative justice for youth in Hartford, CT. We set up a group of youth to watch a documentary, *School to Prison Pipeline*; to give the youth an idea of how our judicial system is set-up. Secondly, the youth put the information they learned in a powerpoint to present to the director of the program. Finally, after a lot of research, we assisted the youth in finding similarities that correlates how restorative justice can be an alternative to mass incarceration. The youth were impressed with this project and plan to come up with skits or role plays to get the message out to other youth in Hartford, CT.

Two students attended an event that was put on by Pioneer Valley Project that focused on ending mass incarceration in the state of Massachusetts. The event took place at Sacred Heart

Catholic Church here in Springfield. Approximately 500 people were in attendance. During the event different individuals who have been affected by mass incarceration shared their testimony about the issue. One woman spoke about how she was denied a good paying job for a decade due to one mistake that she made when she was a teenager. Nick Cocchi, who is the new elected Sheriff gave his insight, and made promises to be one of the front runners in ending this national issue. There were elected officials present at this event as well. They promised to help end this injustice. One of our group members took a script and fact sheet from one of the organizations, Neighbor to Neighbor, and will be using this script to call her local officials and advocate they vote in favor of the Justice Reinvestment Act.

We were amazed at the statistics shared at this event when it came to the rates of individuals incarcerated here in Massachusetts. African Americans are 8 times more likely to be incarcerated here in Mass than whites, and Latinos are 5 times more. It was interesting to hear these individuals speak on the fact that Springfield has become a dumping ground for individuals with felonies. They are shipped here from Boston with no support and no skills to gain and maintain employment

At the end, it was heartwarming to see Central high school seniors speak about their knowledge and awareness of the issue as they begin to transition to either college or the workforce. They have started a social media initiative to raise awareness of this issue. They asked us to tweet through Twitter or post through Facebook different hashtags directed at Governor Charlie Baker, who did not show up or send a representative to this event.

Unfortunately, mass incarceration is an ongoing problem that significantly affects the minority population. We were surprised to hear that the city of Springfield used a “dumping

ground” for inmates who are released outside of the Springfield area. Many times they are not recidivism. Some group members believe that it is the responsibility of the government to provide quality education and assistance to those in poverty to decrease the likelihood of those who commit crimes. Many people are also wrongfully imprisoned due to racist tactics practiced by law enforcement. Racism is an ongoing issue that cannot be changed overnight.

One of our group members painted a piece of art that showed an African American man in prison, with his family looking at him from behind bars. This painting identifies the sadness between the families and shows the struggle of having to see your family and be kept away from them behind bars. It shows how the black man is suffering due to incarceration. The picture also shows scars on the black male’s face, due to guards physically abusing him. Looking into the woman's face you can see how there is a state of depression and emptiness inside of her. Our group member presented this piece of art at Windsor High School to students in the Bridges Program. The Bridges program assist students who are on the verge of dropping out of school or having struggles in the regular education setting due to emotional or academic issues. The program also assist students entering their senior year who request assistance with transition plans after high school. One of the professors asked our group member to come in and present her art to the classroom because the class had been discussing mass incarceration. After showing the classroom the piece of art, there were a few students who volunteered to share how they could relate to the art personally. Two African American students (one female, one male), both spoke about how their fathers are currently in prison. One student shared how her father was committed for a crime he did not commit, and the other spoke about how his father being in prison affected him emotionally, in school and at home. Both students struggled to share their story because it was very personal to them, but it was also a way for them to show their teachers

a different side of their personality. By these students sharing their stories, a couple teachers requested to speak directly with the students to develop a better relationship and communication because the teachers had no idea the students were going through this kind of hardship.

The teachers of the Bridges Program asked our group member to run an hour long art session with the students on Mass Incarceration. It felt good to go back to the school and connect with these students because there was so much purpose and meaning behind doing so. Students were empowered and had the ability to share a part of their lives with other students and staff in the school.

One of our group members attended a poetry reading and art exhibition put on by participants of the program Voices From Inside, a locally based nonprofit, using poetry, metaphor, and the writing process to help women successfully process their feelings and traumas. She was able to have twenty-two of the poetry workshop with our teen center. Although not technically an intervention, this micro-macro interaction will hopefully help to provide an opportunity for authentic conversation and interaction.

After researching the topic of Mass Incarceration, we have accumulated knowledge of the social movement. We have been able to use this information in practice to education our clients on the matter. One of our group members had a client this semester who was offered Mass Incarceration as an elective at school, and because of their discussion on the subject he felt motivated to take the course at school and learn more about the social movement. Her client who is a Hispanic male, felt it was important for him to learn about the risk and probability of him going to prison for minor crimes because of his race. The course he took looked at schools and

also allowed him to learn even more about mass incarceration and shared the gained knowledge with his peers.

In this day and age, technology is moving rather rapidly. Creating social media pages and writing blogs on this issue is very helpful. In relation to this project, one of our group members have written on her social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter to help raise an awareness of mass incarceration in the United States. She has written forums that have discussed the impact mass incarceration has on everyone that is involved. She has opened up discussions on Facebook addressing how mass incarceration affects both children and families of individuals who are incarcerated. She has noted that in doing this, she has received a lot of feedback and different perspectives on how people view Mass Incarceration as a policy issue. Many people vocalized that they did not understand mass incarceration and how the amount of prisoner's in the U.S. has increased by an alarming amount. By creating forums and opening up discussions on social sites such as Facebook, she has been given the opportunity to spread knowledge and ways to eradicate the issue in a non-traditional way. She hopes that once this project is completed she is still given the opportunity to create forums to discuss the impact mass incarceration has on everyone.

Although she has not been able to do other things to help spread awareness to mass incarceration, she believes creating a mural relating to the effects mass incarceration has on people would be very beneficial. Creating a mural that has a focal point on the jail systems and those affected by it would be a very innovative way to address mass incarceration on a creative level. Although this would take a lot of devotion and time, the final product would be very beneficial to raise awareness to the issue of mass incarceration.

## **17. Personal accounts for group project**

This project helped me to broaden my understanding of how much of an impact mass incarceration truly has on the population of the United States. As I continue to research this topic, the connection between racist policies and the level of mass incarceration becomes more clear and apparent. As Michelle Alexander so aptly named her 2012 classic, *The New Jim Crow* really does embody the gravity of the problem. Another student stated how his mass incarceration affected him universally.

Personally, I have learned as we move into our professional careers as social workers, this lens will inform the very way we view the world and will impact the interventions we choose and the means through which we attempt to make a positive change in the world.

Feedback from classmates was an overwhelmingly positive experience. All members enjoyed working collaboratively on such a large topic. Listening to and reading different opinions and gaining a more comprehensive perspective of how classmates understood Mass Incarceration and its impacts on the world were enlightening.

The feedback was both positive and negative, as constructive and synergistic. All of the input aided us in drafting a quality paper.

We learned that it was encouraging to get positive feedback from our group members about their thoughts on the reform that a member attended. They were happy to hear that so many people turned out to this event, and it was not just individuals who are impacted by mass incarceration. The feedback was helpful because it helped the group as a whole to gain some more ideas as we continue to look for ways in getting involved in ending this social injustice. For the most part, we are all positive people, so in the event others in the group would have

responded in a negative way, other members in our group would have tried to find some common ground on the topic.

After reading about grant writing in Wronka's (2017) book, *Social Justice*, it is safe to say as a group, we learned it would take a lot of time and money to get all the moving parts of this proposal accurate and ready to submit. This act alone can be tiresome and if one does not remain open-minded about the process, it can be daunting enough for one to give up.

In regards to feedback, most of the group's reaction to receiving and providing feedback from one another was enlightening. All of our group members were careful to encourage rather than discourage one another. Most of the feedback was helpful and made our work on this project successful.

### **18. Implementing Social Action**

The group came together and discussed possible social action strategies we could work on. One of the ideas that came up were: calling and/or contacting local state Representatives to make them aware of the issue at hand. The group came together by discussing what social actions were already in place with our topics. One member stated that she was going to interview some incarcerated individuals. Two other members were able to attend a reform directed at mass incarceration. One member is in the process of writing a letter to Elizabeth Warren discussing the topic, and how getting individuals like her to help with spreading awareness on the issue, and hopefully getting involved with the individuals who have taken the initiative to end the social issue. I think that as a group, some of have known each other for a year because of the social work program, so it was easy for us to form a group based on familiarity.

When it was time to choose a topic for this project, Mass Incarceration was something everyone was comfortable with and had an idea of what they felt like they could contribute to the



group. We were able to utilize our trust within each other in order to make this possible. We also brainstormed and gathered ideas from each other through conversations. We began by talking about what about this particular issue drew us in and interested us. We then looked to what events and local initiatives, as well as state, national and international (i.e. letters to the UN) existed and saw a number of options. Going to the April 6th Jobs not Jails and Pioneer Valley Project event promoting the passage of the Justice Reinvestment Act event is a way of interacting locally with an issue that has immediate local and also much broader societal impact. We were able to share resources and data in order to gather material for certain topics, which made this project less difficult. We were able to communicate both in person and through email for the project. The group was also able to research local events regarding Mass Incarceration as well as recommend documentaries to watch pertaining to Mass Incarceration, as it was relevant to this project.

Attending one of the meetings those community members would be hosting to speak of further action that could be taken regarding the matter was beneficial way to implement social action. We shared fliers that had been posted around the community regarding the issue. Some suggestions regarding social action is getting individuals involved who are aware of the issue and have a common belief on how to address it. You need individuals who will advocate, have awareness, show leadership ability, have done research, and provide solutions to ending the issue. These individual must be non-violent because violence is not going to solve the issue. Being violent is going to show lawmakers, that we are no different from the individuals that they perceive to be violent who are currently incarcerated. It is vital to begin implementing change locally and build from there to make change on a macro level.

In order to successfully participate in social action, individuals must take initiative to persevere even when things don't turn out the way that they wanted. Social action takes perseverance and determination in order to promote the cause and bring awareness of the matter in hopes that someday change will be attained. Discussion regarding this topic should include race, those affected, inequality and police involvement.

Other key points to include in the discussion of this topic are the injustice that the individuals are receiving, and the impact that mass incarceration has on the community. There are individuals who are currently doing long sentences for nonviolent crimes. There are cases where these individuals turned to drug dealing so that they were able to provide for their families as the job force was scarce for them. If we can take the money that is used to keep these individuals incarcerated, and use it toward getting those resources to better education and find jobs, then that can be the beginning to solving this issue. This leads into the impact of the community because when communities are properly funded, we do not see as much crimes and arrest rates. The access to resources and gaining sustainable employment is higher. Giving people a sense of belief is what we need to do as social workers to help better their communities. A lot of these individuals do not believe that they can be better citizens in their community, so they turn to criminal behavior because they have perceived acceptance through the eyes of the individuals they emulate their lives after. Some other key points to include in this discussion would be the history of the old laws and policies surrounding mass incarceration. As Wronka has mentioned, "everything has a history and when advocating to change societal attitudes, one need to know the history of the phenomenon".

In discussing and or writing a paper on mass incarceration it is important for us as social workers to keep an open mind, be mindful of personal beliefs and values, to be nonjudgmental

competent and ethical. Mass Incarceration is one of, if not, the biggest issues facing our country today regarding access to equity, justice, and equal treatment under the law. As social workers, we are uniquely positioned to combat this injustice and it is imperative that we do so, our code of ethics implores us too!

### **19. Evaluating Our Efforts**

As a group we identified several challenges that we faced while working on this social action project. One of those challenges was the broadness of the topic. As a group we had to choose a particular population to write about. Each of our group members were fully invested as full time graduate students, interns, and involved in personal responsibilities which sometimes limited our capacity to give our full efforts to this assignment. The completion of this assignment resulted in our effectiveness to stick together as group members and do the best we could ending our semester as graduate students. We were able to effectively connect with other agencies and individuals around the issue of mass incarceration. We have become better individually as Social Workers to make an effective change on all levels regarding mass incarceration.

This project opened our eyes to how big of an issue mass incarceration is on the policy level. It was very time restrictive and if we had more time and resources we would have loved to be more involved in the political arena. Although we have created forums to help raise awareness to the issue of mass incarceration, we could have done more. As a whole, we could have worked more directly in the political arena. Primarily, by contacting state senates as well as writing letters to individuals in the political scene. This could have been more impactful and the voice of our group as well as others could have been heard on a more political level. We could have also researched some bills to see what policy makers are doing to combat the issue of mass

incarceration. Over all as a group we gained knowledge of the issue and were able to reflect on our efforts to bring social awareness. We also learned about a variety of ways that we could advocate for the social issue.

One group member felt that we did well getting involved in spreading awareness on our topic. After attending an event that brought awareness, and set up a plan to end the social injustice, this member went on Facebook, and posted all the information that he was made aware of. It got immediate response from people who were not aware of the injustice. This gave him the opportunity to elaborate more on the issue to those people; who thanked him for making them aware; and now wants to get involved with solving the conflict.

Some of our group members feared that the negativity of people close to us would discourage us from doing more. These people worried that if we went out and challenged lawmakers about this issue, then we would not get many employment opportunities in the future. As a group we did not feel the same way because we know that there are potential employers out there who are aware of this issue, and may want to get involved with the plan. There also may be situations where our knowledge on the topic could help the employer become aware of the topic. The opinions of others could sometimes be discouraging but as a group we worked diligently to spread awareness of the topic regardless of what others thought about it.

Overall, the group worked together well and had an organized system to get everything accomplished. All group members had valuable information to bring forth to our project. This assignment was evidently overwhelming for one person to complete alone. This assignment was very lengthy and complex so it was difficult to focus on different aspects of it other than what are duties were within the group.



