

The Age of Mass Incarceration

The Entrenchment of the Carceral State in our Communities

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Research Project Overview

The U.S. incarcerates more of its own citizens than any country in history. That's because fifty years ago, policymakers began criminalizing social problems like poverty, racial inequality, mental illness, and drug addiction.

While most people “age out” of crime during young adulthood, many have cycled through incarceration, treatment centers, homeless shelters, and other institutions for decades. Today, record numbers of formerly incarcerated older adults are leaving jails and prisons and returning to their communities.

I examine how things like important life events, stigma, probation and parole, and the availability of community resources influence outcomes and experiences for this group. I have three working hypotheses: 1) Aging criminal justice populations represent an important and growing social problem. 2) Lifelong patterns of incarceration are explained better by unmet biological, psychological, and social needs than by “risk” or criminality. 3) Ill-informed, irrational, and short-sighted policies, policymakers, and high-level decision makers created an avoidable problem that many of the same people are now trying to solve.

Research Assistant Duties

We are looking for dedicated students and alumni who will work independently and meet weekly for group discussions about progress and next steps. You can choose from three tasks: 1) Find, download, and organize quantitative data on the criminal justice system, public spending, and other information relevant for understanding mass incarceration. 2) Transcribe interviews and/or qualitatively code interview data. Interviews include formerly incarcerated older adults, probation officers, service providers, policymakers, and more. 3) Gather and organize historical information about important state and national policies and events that help explain mass incarceration.

Research Assistant Qualifications and Requirements

The most important qualifications are 1) an interest in the topic, 2) a desire to learn about academic research, 3) a commitment to attend weekly meetings and complete assigned work, 4) the ability to work both independently and as a group, and 5) the tendency to communicate clearly about expectations, problems, and questions. No previous research experience is necessary. A commitment of around 5-10 hours a week is required.

Any Additional Information Applicants Should Know

Whether you are trying to gain experience with a particular method, learn more about a topic, or explore potential career paths, I try to make sure whatever you're doing is mutually beneficial. I take this approach because I have had great mentors who did the same for me, and also because I know that when your work aligns with your interests and goals, you tend to do more of it.

[Complete this form if you are interested](#) or get in touch with any questions.

There are at least 1.5 hours of required meetings each week. The meeting is scheduled for Fridays 12:00-1:30. It might be possible to work around the required meetings if you can't make it, but it is more difficult and less engaging. Let me know if you are interested but can't make it to the meeting time.

The group size ranges from around 8-20 people, but student-led "small group" meetings have 3-8 people so you can discuss your work in greater depth.