
Enemy of the Prosecutor, Mass Incarceration of America's Poor People

John Pfaff in his book, *Locked In*, uses charts and figures to explain the mass incarceration in America. Highlighting and dismissing the common wrong opinions on reformation in the system for 200 pages. The already over-populated prison and jail system has to look at prosecutorial power instead of the public's focal point, of drug laws, sentencing reform, and private prisons. Although, there are real issues in all of these divisions the real demon lies in your local government. In reading, one will realize there is deep structural problems behind America's mass incarceration not just the set few that are thrown to the public eye.

“The War on Drugs”

As an American living in this country, born in the 90's, I've seen the movement of militarizing law enforcement in means of stopping drugs. Now, 2019, we are in the largest opiate epidemic the world has seen going on for now 10 years. This, “War on Drugs” started well after Nixon and by the time Reagan became President America's mass incarceration was well on its way. It is myth that ending the drug war would free up resources and prison space. Many people arrested for drugs are put in jail or prison because of increased penalties for violent offenders. A police officer could believe that the drug abuser was involved in some sort of violent crime this, in turn, pushes for the official arrest. John Pfaff states, ‘Violence is a phase, not a state’ because it's not how most individuals are born, so it rather nurtures than nature. More than one factor determines someone to be violent, like age, family status, employment opportunities, and ultimately, demographics. When convicting someone of a violent crime most of these factors are simply dismissed by the public. Pfaff avoids this and seeks to explain violence as inherent to the person, not the circumstance of their action. Prison and Jail does not deter someone who has grown up in a violent environment, John explains this further with plenty of graphical data to support his claims.

Complex System Driven by Lost Data

Understanding the way, the United States Criminal Justice system works starts with learning who the real decision makers are. The head of the snake, is the prosecutors that decides whether an individual will be brought to trial, what charges are going to be given, and of course, plea deals. Except at the federal level, these decision makers in charge of the law are elected rather than appointed. What is alarming to the public and myself is, John mentions there is tiny supervision, and regulation on these decisions by these individuals. If you or anyone you know goes into a courtroom you will always here the term, plea deal. The scary part is in the book it mentions 95% of cases will never see trial in America. This may be one of the fastest drivers for mass incarceration in America. These elected officials and wielders of the law will be elected by the whiter communities, and crime-scared suburban cities. It's troublesome to watch the poorer mostly urban population that are more life threatened by crimes deal with these real-life effects. All because of random ignorant votes that don't see day to day effects of ‘tough on crime’.

This book will teach any individual from any walk of life what news of the criminal justice system

is highlighted and brought to the so called 'lime-light'. The United States has widespread ignorance and plagues the criminal justice system with negative convictions. Pointing fingers at symptoms and not the root of the illness in the correctional system. Voters are often times completely ignorant of actual crime trends and focus on shocking cases. Starting with your community, it's very important to educate individuals on the importance of voting in proper prosecutors. Small working changes in your community and will be data driven with solutions costing nothing but your time to go vote.

It's hard to ignore the division rising as mass incarceration takes over almost every community in America. The alternative framework for what true justice means and what it looks like for each individual is causing separation in communities. Resulting in misunderstanding from both the left and right political parties that have an effect on the criminal justice system. Instead of focusing on the Correction Facility of America and all the positions that are in it and their importance, alternative efforts are being made, what I'd call a wild goose chase for the users of the drugs. Deterring your undivided attention from people being wrongfully incarcerated all over America, in your own community. Under the influence of drugs does not help you when facing a prosecutor with more than one offense, but having a high paid lawyer does. This is disproportionate when I think about the effects on the rich drug dealer. That being said the rich drug dealer can pay off a high paid lawyer but a heavy drug abuser has no money and will go with a court appointed, or in some cases, no one. This system is unfair to someone who is mentally incapable of decisions but fair to what they are publicizing they are going after? The true hypocrites of society sit behind the law and think others do not notice.

John Pfaff, and other individuals revealing these truths, as myths, of the criminal justice system is needed to educate communities. When we do the same thing over and over again expecting a different result, we enter insanity and that is where America has unfortunately landed. The return rate and over-populated prisons reveal cracks in the system and it's only a matter of time before it all collapses. It can be saved but it's up to us to not pass judgements and truly apply ourselves for Correctional Reform.

References

1. Pfaff, J. F. (2017). Locked in: The true causes of mass incarceration--and how to achieve real reform. New York: Basic Books.