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NWAOnline.com
Prison Population Tide Continues To Increase
By Ron Wood
Sunday, November 14, 2010
NORTHWEST ARKANSAS — Arkansas prison officials said they’re being swamped by unprecedented inmate population growth but while they look for ways to house them, the human tide continues to increase.
Locally, judges and prosecutors say they still have a job to do and, in some cases, that means sending people to prison.
“Our growth right now is at an all-time high,” said Dina Tyler, Arkansas Department of Correction spokeswoman.
Tyler said the department is seeing its normal number of returnees but also seeing lots of new faces.
“That tells me our pool of criminals is growing,” Tyler said.
Since the 1970s state population has grown about 30 percent. The prison population has grown 600 percent, Tyler said.
Over the last 15 years, an average of 33 new inmates a month were added to the state prison population, Tyler said. This year, the monthly average has been 119.
“We are far outpacing the growth of Arkansas,” Tyler said. “People say, ‘How can that be? The crime rate is dropping.’ and that’s true. But the crime rate is only one component. You have to look at the crime rate, how many of those crimes are being solved with arrests made and how many of those
arrests are leading to convictions and sentences of incarceration. So, we’ve got actually more cases being solved, more trials ending in guilty verdicts and more sentences being prison.”
Washington County courts have been sending more people to prison each year. In 2006, there were 686 people sent to either the Department of Correction or the Department of Community Correction. In 2007, the number was 727. By 2008, it had reached 800. In 2009, Washington County sent 846 people to state lockups.
“Everybody would like to have fewer people in the prison system,” said John Threet, Washington County prosecuting attorney. “But, I think we have to be careful how we reach that goal.”
Threet said his deputy prosecutors don’t seek prison time unless the evidence shows the person really deserves to be incarcerated.
“They’re not there by accident. There’s a reason those people are down there,” Threet said. “We don’t look at these numbers thinking we need to beat that number from last year.”
Circuit Judge William Storey said judges and prosecutors try to find alternative sentences, such as probation, when possible, but that only goes so far.
“It’s a function of the seriousness of the crime as well as the criminal history of the defendant,” Storey said. “Generally speaking, there’s an attempt to use probation as an alternative when the crime’s not too terribly serious or the defendant is not a repeat offender. There are some people who end up on probation or county jail time that really should probably go to prison, but that’s just, unfortunately, a fact of life that we have to deal with.”
Threet said prison overcrowding should not be dealt with by limiting what prosecutors, judges and juries do in their communities.
“If you start messing with the front end, you’re messing with what the community wants done,” Threet said.
Arkansas has a recidivism rate of almost 50 percent, meaning half of those released from prison will return, Threet said.
“We’ve identified the population at risk,” Threet said. “We need to look at doing a better job on that end.”
Threet said he’d like to see more education and treatment programs provided to reduce recidivism. The Department of Community Correction is based in large part on that theory and appears to be more effective than punishment alone, Threet said.
In June, Gov. Mike Beebe’s office announced the Public Safety Performance Project of the Pew Center on the States and state prison officials were working on a study to find an idea to curb growth in prison population while maintaining public safety.
“Our prisons are overcrowded, and the continued growth in our prison population and correction costs is unsustainable,” Beebe said. “We are looking for more ways to suitably punish and rehabilitate criminals while saving our prison beds for violent offenders.”
Pew was compiling data on correction trends in Arkansas with the help of state and local agencies. Arkansas’ prison population has more than doubled in the past 20 years and is anticipated to top 21,000 inmates in the next decade.
Building and operating new prisons to accommodate that growth will cost Arkansas an estimated $1.1 billion between now and 2020, according to analysis conducted by the Pew team. Construction costs alone would exceed $350 million.
Earlier this week, prison officials said they will ask the Legislature for an additional $7.4 million to reimburse counties holding state inmates in their county jails.
As of Tuesday there were 1,863 state inmates waiting in county jails for a prison bed to open up. By Friday, that number had increased to 1,939.
Benton County on Friday was holding 161 people awaiting transfer to state prison, the average wait is six to seven months, Capt. Rob Holly said. Washington County was holding 245 state inmates.
The state pays counties $28 per day for each inmate.
The Legislature appropriated $7.5 million to pay counties for housing inmates during the fiscal year ending June 30, 2011, but the money is expected to run out by the end of December, according to prison officials. Threet said the percentage of Arkansans in state prisons is now within 4 percent of the national average. “It’s not that we’re out of control. Arkansas was way behind the rest of the country in incarceration rates and no one was prepared when we caught up,” Threet said, who said some of the state officials’ ideas are good. “I just don’t want people messing with the reason we’re in office,” he said.


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   Like Malcolm X, Mumia refused to scrape and bow. He got the shaft. But so many others languish behind thick gray walls. It hurts every American!
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2. Shambhala Sun - A Nation Behind Bars
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   "However the crime rate may fall, the prisons will always be filled. We are constructing ugly, brutal environments to house our own children and grandchildren."

3. Focus Alert
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6. More videos for Nation Behind Bars »
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HISTORY

WOMEN

ABOLITION OF PRISONS
ANGELA DAVIS: ABOLISHING PRISONS
Democracy Now (10-19-10) Amy Goodman interviewed Angela Davis for most of the hour, much of it about Davis’s experience with, views about, and advocacy of abolishing prisons. Prisons reflect a failed society. A genuinely caring society would largely eliminate prisons, as in Finland. Prison abolition is part of “building a new world.”
Ms. Davis referred to the book Instead of Prisons: A Handbook for Abolitionists. (Dick)

1. Instead of Prisons Table of Contents
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2. Instead of Prisons Chapter 2
[47] "By freely giving out ... drugs, wardens and guards keep many prisoners ...
3. **Instead of Prisons** Chapter 6

We should further reduce our excessive reliance on **prisons** by making ...


From discussions on the range of voices that comprise the movement for **prison** abolition to demystification of the myths surrounding the justification of ...

5. **[PDF] Treatment Instead of Prisons**

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Treatment **Instead of Prisons**: A Roadmap for Sentencing and Correctional Policy Reform in Wisconsin. This report would not have been possible with- ...

6. **States Eye Drug Treatment Instead of Prisons - 018751**

Oct 31, 2006 ... The use of drug treatment **instead** of incarceration by states in order to cut costs is examined. For ...

7. **Treatment Instead of Prisons | Justice Strategies**

RESEARCH. BY STATE · BY ISSUE · BY PUBLICATION. Treatment **Instead of Prisons**. Treatment **Instead of Prisons**. CONTACT: Justice Strategies / A Tides Center ...

8. **Building Schools Instead Of Prisons | Education**

Aug 27, 2010 ... This could serve as a model for the rest of the country as to how communities can effectively build schools **instead of prisons**. ...

SAN FRANCISCO EDUCATE NOT INCARCERATE

FSTV 7-31-09 Meshe Monge Ingirray. Critical Resistance, [www.criticalresistance.org](http://www.criticalresistance.org)

**CLASS**

*The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison by Jeffrey Reiman.*

Jeffrey Reiman, author of *The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison*, first published his book in 1979; it is now in its sixth edition, and he has continued to revise it as he keeps up on criminal justice statistics and other trends in the system. Reiman originally wrote his book after teaching for seven years at the School of Justice (formerly the Center for the Administration of Justice), which is a multidisciplinary, criminal justice education program at American University in Washington, D.C. He drew heavily from what he had learned from his colleagues at that university. Reiman is the William Fraser McDowell Professor of Philosophy
at American University, where he has taught since 1970. He has written numerous books on
political philosophy, criminology, and sociology.
Reiman states his thesis in the Introduction. He claims that the goal of the American criminal
justice system is not to eliminate crime or even to achieve justice but to project to the people
an image of the idea that the threat of crime emanates from the poor. The system must
"maintain" a large population of poor criminals, and to this end, it must not reduce or eliminate
the crimes that poor people commit. When crime declines, it is not because of our criminal
justice polices, but in spite of them. In testing this idea, Reiman had his students construct a
correctional system that would maintain a stable and visible group of criminals, rather than
eliminating or reducing crime, and they suggested the following:
enact laws against drug abuse, prostitution, and gambling;
give police, prosecutors, and judges broad discretion in deciding who gets arrested, charged,
and sentenced to prison;
make the prison experience demeaning;
do not train prisoners for jobs after release;
deprive offenders of certain rights for the rest of their lives.
The system that emerges is what we have today.
In the chapter, "Crime Control in America," Reiman suggests that the system has been
designed to fail. Imprisoning drug offenders, for instance, does nothing to reduce the number
of drug offenders in society because they are immediately replaced. The decline in violent
crime is more attributable to demographic changes than to enforcement efforts. Most of the
decline in crime results from forces beyond the control of the criminal justice systems. Reiman
also feels that we could reduce crime if we wanted to do so, and that our excuses are not
really answers to the problem, but merely excuses to explain why the system fails. We know
the causes of crime—poverty, prison, and drugs—yet we do nothing to change how these things
operate, such as banning guns and decriminalizing drugs.
In the chapter, "A Crime by Any Other Name . . . ," Reiman considers how language is used to
identify some actions, and he argues that such things as workplace-related deaths that could
be prevented should be considered crimes, as well. As far as the criminal justice system is
concerned, the face of crime is young, male, poor, and black. Reiman believes that the
criminal justice system helps create this reality, projecting a particular image of crime and
hiding the larger reality of social injustice and even white-collar crime. They identify crime as a
direct, personal assault and ignore many other damages caused by carelessness and greed
of a different order. Reiman details threats from the workplace, the health care system, the
use of chemicals by various companies, and poverty itself, none of which are considered
offenses. Reiman feels that the criminal justice system distorts the image of what truly threatens
society.
In the chapter, ". . . And the Poor Get Prison," Reiman points out what many have noted that
the offender in prison is most likely someone from one of the lowest social and economic
groups in the nation. The poor are more likely to be arrested for a particular crime, while
wealthier people are merely warned. Reiman uses evidence of the differential treatment of
blacks for several reasons: 1) blacks are disproportionately poor; 2) the factors that are most likely to keep an offender out of prison do not apply to poor blacks; 3) blacks and whites in prison come from the same general socio-economic status; 4) race adds to the effects of economic condition; and 5) the economic powers in America could end or reduce racist bias in the criminal justice system if they wanted to do so. Reiman believes they see it as to their economic advantage not to curb crime. He finds that police, prosecutors, and judges all make certain that the poor are more likely to go to prison than the well-to-do. This should not be the case, given that white-collar crime is costly, widespread, and rarely punished. Even when arrested and convicted, white-collar criminals do not do the same amount of time as the poor, and do not go to the same prisons.

In his chapter, "To the Vanquished Belong the Spoils," Reiman considers why the criminal justice system is failing and finds that it is not an accident, but rather an intentional action by the rich and powerful to keep the system operating as it is. He does not say this is a conspiracy and offers reasons why a conspiracy theory does not explain what has happened. The poor are more likely to be victims, as well, and they lack the money or power to change the system in any way. On the other hand, those who are in a position to change the system are not in enough jeopardy to initiate change. The criminal justice system is extremely visible in American society and popular culture, and there is an ideology of criminal justice that is implicit, concentrating on individual wrong-doers and directing our attention away from social institutions and their actions. This distorts the nature and reality of the problem facing society. Because there is an association between crime and poverty in the popular mind, there is also a bias against the poor.

In the concluding chapter, Reiman considers what he calls the Crime of Justice, or the crime society is perpetrating against the poor and powerless by allowing the system to continue as structured, and, in effect, create crime rather than reducing it. The goals of protecting society and promoting justice are both ill-served under the current system. Taken as a whole, Reiman's book puts forth a solid argument that the system does not serve the public as presently constituted, and the proof is not merely in growing or diminishing crime rates, but in incorporating a broader concept of social justice into the system itself. Certain specific actions might be taken, such as decriminalizing drugs or reducing the number of guns in circulation, but clearly each of these ideas has massive opposition waiting to stop any such effort. Reiman's concept of social justice is more in keeping with sociological theories that find systemic reasons for crime, which is quite different from the prevailing individual actor theories that are so embedded in the system. Reiman is less convincing in the way he describes the system as intentionally bias, for he makes it sound as if it were an organized conspiracy. That is simply not the case. The book is provocative and has many good ideas, including a thorough analysis of the current criminal justice system and how that system may b changed to better represent, serve, and protect ALL Americans.