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Black Male Incarceration and the Preservation of Debilitating Habits of Judgment:
An examination of Mississippi

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Southern Studies
The University of Mississippi
Following the American Psychological Association guidelines

by

Teah M. Hairston

July 2013

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to discover how mass incarceration and other historical methods of racialized social control in the South have preserved and reinforced habits of judgment that adversely affect the social mobility of Black males in Mississippi. A historical research method was employed to locate and analyze recurring themes of habitual judgment patterns justifying age-old systems of social control and how those patterns have influenced the current trend of Black male incarceration at disproportionate rates. Questionnaires were administered to professional employees from the Mississippi Department of Corrections (MDOC) in attempt to gather useful data about the socioeconomic backgrounds of the Black male inmate population and identify the key factors for their imprisonment. Theories of crime and deviance were applied to establish and identify relationships between recurring concepts found in existing literature and inferences made from data collected from questionnaires completed by MDOC employees. Findings suggest that disconnections from institutions because of discriminatory practices and social stratification, and the weakening of Black males' bonds to the very institutions of power that prevent crime (e.g., family, education, and employment) as a consequence of imprisonment, enable the reproduction of habits of judgment which manifest through popular culture (e.g., media, literature, etc.) rationalizing public concern. In turn, policies implemented to ensure public safety target disadvantaged Black communities, engender higher rates of arrest and incarceration, and facilitate a vicious cycle of crime and poverty preserving the socioeconomic inferiority of Black males in Mississippi.

DEDICATION

To my family for the love, encouragement, and inspiration you have provided. To my friends for sharing memorable experiences with me that sustained my spiritual energy to persevere.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....ii

DEDICATION.....iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....iv

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....1

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....25

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS.....36

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY.....44

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS.....50

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION.....59

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION.....85

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....92

APPENDICES.....98

 Appendix A: Research Questionnaires.....99

 Appendix B: Mississippi Department of Corrections Active Inmates Primary
 Offenses.....102

 Appendix C: Population Under Control of the U.S. Corrections System,
 1980 & 2011.....104

 Appendix D: Rate of Incarceration per 100,000, by Gender, Race, & Ethnicity 2011...106

 Appendix E: Race/Ethnicity-Specific Imprisonment in Mississippi (per 100,000) in
 2005.....108

 Appendix F: Federal & State Prison Population, by Offense.....110

 Appendix G: Mississippi Department of Corrections Prisoner Offences, by Race.....112

VITA.....114

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Questionnaire Responses (Question #2).....	53
Table 2 Number of People in Prisons and Jails for Drug Offenses, 1980 and 2011.....	82

LIST OF FIGURES

Appendix A Research Questionnaires.....	99
Appendix B Mississippi Department of Corrections Active Inmates Primary Offense.....	102
Appendix C Population Under Control of the U.S. Corrections System, 1980 & 2011.....	104
Appendix D Rate of Incarceration per 100,000, by Gender, Race, & Ethnicity 2011.....	106
Appendix E Race/Ethnicity-Specific Imprisonment in Mississippi (per 100,000) in 2005.....	108
Appendix F Federal & State Prison Population, by Offense.....	110
Appendix G Mississippi Department of Corrections Prisoner Offences, by Race.....	112

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Mississippi has maintained an extremely controversial reputation regarding race relations and methods of racialized social control for hundreds of years (Alexander, 2012; Gray, 1991). As one of the strongest supporters of slavery, and one of the most reluctant and thus last to integrate, the state still seems to be characterized by its racial division. One of the most observable consequences of the state's historical disharmony and systems of social control is the current mass incarceration of disproportionate numbers of African American males.

Since its upsurge in the 1980s (see Appendix C), the mass incarceration of Black males has been compared to several historical approaches used to oppress African Americans in the South (Garrison, 2011; Gilmore, 2000; Wacquant, 2000). Many authors who have studied mass incarceration have compared its design to the institution of slavery (Gilmore, 2000; Smith & Hattery, 2008; Weatherspoon, 2007; Weaver & Purcell, 1998). The comparison of imprisonment to enslavement seems plausible: like slavery, African Americans, particularly males, constitute an extremely unbalanced number of those caught in the penal system in contrast to Whites; many of these Black men are held in confinement for trivial and unjust reasons. In places like Mississippi State Penitentiary, also known as Parchman Farm, where African American males comprise approximately 72 percent of those imprisoned, inmates are forced to perform hard labor while being overlooked by gun clutching guards (Gilmore, 2000; Winter & Hanlon, 2008). Each of these current characteristics of the incarceration experience closely resembles features of slavery, justifying the frequency of comparisons. Moreover, Gilmore (2000) asserts, "Drawing

these links [between slavery and mass incarceration] has been important in explaining the relationship between racism and criminalization after emancipation, and in connecting the rise of industrial and mechanized labor to the destructive effects of deindustrialization and globalization” (p. 195).

Other scholars have compared incarceration and the emergence of the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) to the convict-lease system. Raza (2011) refers to the convict-lease system “as both an economic and social consequence of Southern Reconstruction” (p. 164). After slavery was abolished, Southern Whites took advantage of the Thirteenth Amendment’s language asserting the acceptability of convicts being forced to labor without pay and designed the convict-lease system. The result was the excessive criminalization of Black males who were arrested and convicted of trivial crimes, sold and/or leased to private parties, and forced to perform taxing labor as a consequence of their punishment and payment for restitution (Blackmon, 2008; Fierce, 1994; Oshinsky, 1996; Raza, 2011; Smith & Hattery, 2010; Weaver & Purcell, 1998). Black males were leased to private parties at particularly low rates and therefore valued much less than slaves, who were expensive investments. They, nonetheless, performed similarly exhausting labor (e.g. such as coal mining and constructing railroads, etc.) that generated great revenue for much of the South as did slaves with their expertise in agricultural work and husbandry.

The Prison Industrial Complex functions in a like manner. Inmates are exploited to perform free or, virtually, unpaid labor for major companies and corporations who are turning over sizeable profits from inmate labor. Ironically, a substantial number of inmates are African Americans, much like those exploited through convict-leasing. Furthermore, the revenue accrued from prison industries is substantial to many Southern states’ economic survival as it was during

the era of convict-leasing (Blackmon, 2008; Wood, 2007). Overall, "...mass imprisonment was employed as a means of coercing resistant freed slaves into becoming wage laborers" (Gilmore, 2000, p. 198).

More recently, Michelle Alexander (2012) has introduced a compelling theory identifying the contemporary mass incarceration of Black people, especially Black males, as "The New Jim Crow." Beginning in the late 1870s until the 1960s, Southern state legislatures passed laws that enforced the legal separation of Blacks and Whites in public places (e.g. parks, restaurants, theaters, etc.), schools, and on public transportation (Alexander, 2012; Raza, 2011). In addition, after being violently intimidated by White supremacist organizations teamed with Southern White Conservatives, and hence, dissuaded from voting, most African Americans were disenfranchised (Raza, 2011). African Americans comprised the majority, and in many Confederate states, nearly half of the U.S. South's population; therefore, their exclusion from voting, and inability to contribute or have a say in decisions that would affect their communities, safeguarded White power and fortified ideas of White supremacy.

Alexander (2012) argues that the mass incarceration of African Americans, especially Black males, functions much the same as Jim Crow because of legalized discriminatory practices that affect not only ex-offenders upon release, but also the families, and communities to which they return. Policies that prevent ex-offenders from successfully transitioning and functioning in mainstream society after imprisonment (e.g. disqualification from federal funding for housing, education, and food assistance) exacerbates existing social problems for many Black communities and, like Jim Crow, reinforces negative attitudes toward African Americans (regarding education, work ethic, and behavior) while strengthening notions of White superiority.

It is by no coincidence scholars associate the function of mass incarceration to historical methods of racialized social control, for it is an institution so eerily similar to slavery, Jim Crow, Black Codes, and convict-leasing in respect to the ways each system has worked to oppress the Black race. Ideas of racial supremacy and the desire to maintain racial order by oppressing the racial other has a long and disturbing history in the South that has, undoubtedly, permitted such inhumane and unjust control methods to persist. African Americans were placed under total control with the institution of slavery and convict-leasing. As slaves, Whites completely dictated every aspect of African American lives. Following emancipation, although not to the same extreme extent, the lives of free Blacks were, nonetheless, dominated through the enforcement of Jim Crow laws and restrictions of Black Codes. Unwritten boundaries, in addition to the countless laws prohibiting Blacks from exercising basic human rights, such as obtaining an education, gaining fruitful employment, and owning property, maintained and reproduced the racial order many Whites in the South believed, or at least, proclaimed, was God ordained (Blackmon, 2008). The American prison system was resurrected as an amalgamation of each of these instruments used historically to control people of color. Its effects have been comparable in that social and economic opportunities African Americans were deprived of in the past are virtually the same opportunities they are denied access to as a result of incarceration contemporarily (Weatherspoon, 2007).

The comparison of mass incarceration to old customs of racial oppression may be supported at greater lengths when placed in a strictly Southern context (Eason, 2010; Tullos, 2011). In the Southern region of the United States, where the roots of racialized social control are profound, African American populations are larger and more heavily concentrated than in other regions, and incarceration rates for Black males are significantly higher, the corollaries of these

elements combined have been colossal (Bassett, 2006; Eason, 2010; Gray, 1991). Inequalities in education, employment, and public benefits adversely affect African Americans in the South, especially those located in rural locations who receive very little attention in academia and in local and national news compared to urban communities (Bassett, 2006). Likewise, the rights, treatment, challenges, and overall life experiences of inmates and ex-offenders are ignored at great lengths and relatively invisible to the masses. Importantly, what is overlooked is how social inequalities that are so extreme in the South and disproportionately affect underprivileged African Americans create the circumstances under which individuals feel it is necessary to commit crime that eventually leads to the disproportionate incarceration of African Americans. In other words, there is a symbiosis between poverty and crime that appears more crippling for Black males in the rural South than for those in metropolitan areas due to the lack of interest and concern for both poor Black populations inhabiting the stigmatized rural South, and criminals who represent the ultimate failures of society.

For the state of Mississippi, specifically, the consequences of racial oppression, structural inequalities, and mass incarceration have proven socially and economically detrimental not only to its African American residents, but to the state as a whole (Gray, 1991; Hill, 2008). Mississippi remains in the top ranking for incarceration rates and poverty, while maintaining the lowest levels of educational attainment and business success (Burd-Sharps, et al., 2009; U.S. Census Report, 2011). The Mississippi Human Development Report of 2009 details, “Mississippi ranks second-to-last on the health index and income index (Louisiana is last) and last on the education index” (Burd-Sharps, et al., 2009, p. 5). For example, “An average Connecticut resident earns 60 percent more...and is almost two times more likely to have college degree than a typical Mississippian” (Burd-Sharps, et al., 2009, p. 5). The report further explains,

“an African American living in Maryland...is twice as likely to have a college degree” than an African American from Mississippi (Burd-Sharps, et al., 2009, p. 5).

Alarming, the Mississippi Development Report indicates, “Mississippians today live as the average American lived more than fifteen years ago when it comes to life expectancy, educational opportunities, and income” (Burd-Sharps, et al., 2009, p. 5). However, “whites who are worse off in the entire state are still better off than the vast majority of African Americans” (Burd-Sharps, et al., 2009, p. 5). The intransience of uneven social structures in addition to the racial division that persists in Mississippi can be acknowledged as contributing factors to the hindrance of the state’s progress. African Americans occupy the lowest position in the state with 38 percent of Black women and 32 percent of Black men living in poverty compared to 14 percent of White women and 11 percent of White men (Hill, 2008, p. 2). The socioeconomic distress of disadvantaged Black families (e.g. deficient employment and educational opportunities, etc.) is exacerbated by mass incarceration in myriad ways that will be explored throughout this manuscript. The lack of social harmony that keeps African Americans in a lowly position reflects poorly on the state in its entirety substantiating negative attitudes about the South and its “backwardness” discouraging people and businesses from wanting to patronize the region (Gray, 1991).

In this manuscript, I propose that the symbiotic relationship between poverty and crime, particularly among Black males in Mississippi, fuels the preservation and reinforcement of negative stereotypes that are deeply rooted in old Southern ideologies, yet, have endured over time. Some White Southerners have held and transmitted the idea that the Black race is inferior. To support this claim, many White Southerners adopted and constructed pejorative conceptions about African Americans that would encumber Blacks’ ability to escape their subordinate

position. Although most of the pre-conceived notions are not factually true, African American males disproportionately confirm these stereotypes (if we rely on official statistics regarding education, employment, incarceration, etc.), hence, making them appear to be true by their deviant reactions or modes of adaptation (see Merton, 1938) to the effects of social structure and social inequalities that too often lead to criminal behavior and result in incarceration. Again, the combination of the remnants of Old Southern doctrine, enduring stereotypes, social inequalities, and the mass criminalization of Black males, continues to adversely affect the lives, socioeconomic circumstances, and social mobility of disadvantaged Black males and their families in Mississippi.

Post-structuralist philosopher Judith Butler (2005), in her publication, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, introduces a concept termed “habits of judgment” that I believe can provide a helpful explanation to understanding why the socioeconomic development and social mobility of African Americans, and Black males, in particular, has been disheartening and remained virtually rigid (Gray, 1991; Hill, 2008). Butler’s (2005) overall argument is that moral philosophy relies on the ability of subjects to give an account of themselves and their actions. In other words, Butler (2005) implies that ethics, which govern a group’s behavior, depends heavily on their capacity to rationalize their conduct, and therefore, people behave in accordance with their cultural beliefs and expectations. Habits of judgment, then, can be understood as customary or repetitious patterns of judging, or developing opinions of people, places, things or circumstances based on one’s own moral philosophies and justifying those opinions or behaviors (giving an account) by employing historical and cultural rationale.

Allen Tullos (2011), in his publication, *Alabama Getaway: The Political Imaginary and the Heart of Dixie*, summarizes Butler’s concept noting that “habits of judgment form through

the confluence of strong affective streams of family, friends, religious affiliations—the full range of social ties, beliefs, and structures” (p. 31). Concisely, the concept explains how ideas and opinions about, and expectations for, particular things or people are transmitted through cultural conventions and social structures.

The philosophy of habitual judgment is useful in understanding the perpetuity of pessimistic attitudes and judgmental patterns practiced by White society toward African Americans that manifest through public policies and are reinforced by representations of Black people in popular culture, and thus adversely affect the social mobility of disadvantaged Black populations. Judgmental patterns intensify when regional stigma is considered in addition to race and class, which is extremely important when examining the patterns of behavior and opinions held by many White Southerners toward Black Southerners and how these judgments are reflected through social and environmental structure. Butler (2005) does not mention or specify Mississippi as a place crippled by habits of judgment; however, her philosophy can undoubtedly be applied to explain why Mississippi’s issues with race relations have only improved minimally in comparison to the rest of the United States.

Butler’s concept suggests, “habits of judgment reveal a culture’s hearts and minds” (Tullos, 2011, p. 27). We may presume Butler’s argument validates the supposition that habits of judgment are what have reinforced the regime of White supremacy, particularly in places like Mississippi where issues of race remain on the forefront (Tullos, 2011, pp. 27-28). For example, age-old stereotypes of Black men as lazy, feebleminded criminals have carried on into present-day stereotypes and, as a result of African Americans’ restricted opportunities in education and employment, are perpetually represented on television, in music, and literature without recognition of their higher rates of disadvantage. The judgment of Black males as criminal has

not only been preserved over time, but is currently standing strong with the overwhelming presence of Black males in the penal system buttressing the idea, and confirming some White Southerners' perceptions of African Americans as incorrigible subordinates of the "underclass," and themselves, superior (Percival, 2009, p. 179).

If accepted, Butler's concept may lead us to understand how and why certain judgmental patterns have prevailed and continue to adversely affect selected groups of people in particular places and spaces by identifying historical ideologies and sentiments of a culture of people that have been transmitted intergenerationally. Distinguishing how specific habits of judgment cultivated, molded, and preserved in the South, then, can facilitate a deeper comprehension of why Blacks remain in an inferior position to Whites and how the mass incarceration of disproportionate numbers of Black males can be recognized as merely one of the consequences of African Americans' historical and contemporary subordination in Mississippi.

A History of Judgment

The foundation of America was built upon habits of judgment. Van Deburg (2004) asserts that "the Atlantic slave trade was grounded in a culture-based habit of mind that latter-day scholars have termed 'racial objectification'—the attempt to turn a person into a thing on the basis of observable racial differences" (p. 15). The decision to capture and enslave Black people initiated from imprecise judgment and stereotypes of unfamiliar Africans by European travelers (Littlefield, 1981). From their encounters crossing the Atlantic, Europeans took great interest in Negroes with unusual behaviors and customs who also exhibited remarkable strength and knowledge about agriculture—distinguishing skills that would be beneficial in the colonization of America (Littlefield, 1981). This triggered ideas in the minds of Europeans looking for ways to launch the successful development of the New World (Littlefield, 1981).

Many Europeans also, however, observed what they considered “avaricious,” “mercenary,” “treacherous,” “cunning,” and “deceitful” behavior by the African groups they encountered (Littlefield, 1981; Morgan, 1975). Van Deburg (2004) states “‘monstrous’ Africans inspired both fear and distaste in the ‘civilized’ mind” (p. 16). In his publication, *Rice and Slaves*, Littlefield (1981) indicates, “ethnocentrism shaped the opinions of Europeans, but it did not blind their business sense,” implying that despite their negative estimations of Negroes, they saw the potential benefit in exploiting their cultural knowledge and practices (p. 52). In fact, as Van Deburg (2004) argues, it was “White racism [that] both facilitated and provided many compelling rationalizations for the economic exploitation of ‘unfamiliar’ and ‘dangerous’ Black people,” (p. 24). European travelers “active in the trade carried...many of their attitudes [about Negroes] to the province” conveying ethnocentric-based opinions from one place to another spreading unfair, inaccurate, constructed ideas of racial supremacy across the Atlantic (Littlefield, 1981, p. 54).

Most Whites (Europeans) who settled in the colonies brought with them stern Christian beliefs and customs, and were thus eventually forced to justify the capture and enslavement of other human beings (Morgan, 1975). As a result, they declared their Black slaves subhuman due to their lack of civility and brutish nature (Morgan, 1975, p. 331). Black people were labeled primitive savages, bestial, and hyper-sexual beings that did not have the capacity to exercise self-restraint, and hence, could not be considered wholly human at all (Burrell, 2010; Johnson, 1999; Littlefield, 1981; Morgan, 1975). Despite their knowledge of agriculture, husbandry, childrearing, etc., Africans/African Americans were considered unintelligent, feebleminded, senseless people (Littlefield, 1981; Morgan, 1975). It was, therefore, the White man’s divine

responsibility to tame them and keep them in their appropriate subjugated position (Morgan, 1975).

In order to keep Blacks under their thumb, Whites forbade Black slaves from attaining an education (Reid, Mims, & Higginbottom, 2005). Anyone caught trying to learn or trying to teach a slave could suffer grave repercussions (Reid et al., 2005, p. 80). Even if a slave was well informed about certain things, experienced in particular areas, or had learned how to read and write, in most cases, it was in his/her best interest to pretend he/she was ignorant and dimwitted to prevent any harm being done unto him (Reid et al., 2005). Therefore, the insult of stupidity as a natural Black trait seemed and held valid and true. The stereotype—as did a myriad of others—carried on over time.

After the emancipation of Black slaves in 1863, habits of judgment did not cease; instead, additional racist sentiments developed and a new method of control was implemented to protect White supremacy in most Southern states, including Mississippi, in the form of Black Codes (Alexander, 2012; Blackmon, 2008). The Black Codes, in essence, were passed to restrict and control the lives of free Blacks (Leary, 2005). By outlawing the simplest of activities for African Americans—for instance, walking the street after dark or trying to board a train—White Americans were able to arrest African Americans, usually men, and exploit them at their own discretion (Blackmon, 2008; Leary, 2005). Although the charge of vagrancy could include more than merely being unemployed, having inadequate proof of a job was not only grounds for arrest, but it also led Whites to the conclusion that Black males were lazy because they were unemployed (Blackmon, 2008). With the prohibition of slavery meaning a great deal of Black males were out of “work” as a result of their freedom, Whites found a way to procure free labor by criminalizing Black males (Alexander, 2012; Blackmon, 2008; Leary, 2005). For, although

the Thirteenth Amendment outlawed the institution of slavery, it deemed forced labor acceptable if it were punishment for a crime (Blackmon, 2008; Gilmore, 2000). The result of this exception manifested in the form of the convict-lease system, which would eventually revitalize many Southern states from the economic disaster generated by the emancipation of Black slaves (Blackmon, 2008; Fierce, 1994; Oshinsky, 1996).

Merely another scheme to control Blacks and “maintain racial hegemony” by forcing legally free men to perform free labor, the convict-lease system reinforced negative perceptions of Black males passed on through generations of White Southerners (Alexander, 2012; Van Deburg, 2004, p. 84). The number of Blacks arrested and condemned to hard labor undoubtedly stimulated the potency of the typecast. Furthermore, the convict-leasing system allowed Whites to capitalize on Black labor and resume the comfortable lifestyles they once enjoyed prior to the prohibition of slavery, upholding their superior status (Blackmon, 2008; Raza, 2011). Importantly, the operation of the convict-lease system set the stage for what would later be recognized as the Prison Industrial Complex (Raza, 2011).

In addition to Black Codes and the emergence of the convict-leasing scheme, Jim Crow laws strengthened, placing further restrictions on African Americans, maintaining the legal separation of races, and fortifying White attitudes of their own supremacy and Black inferiority (Alexander, 2012). Even in the penal setting, a separation of races took place. In jails and prisons where each man was legally recognized as a criminal, White men and Black men were placed in separate units to eat and sleep (Blackmon, 2008). Notwithstanding their equally unlawful statuses, one set of men possessed Whiteness that acted as an indication of their superiority, while the other set wore a badge of shame represented through their Blackness signifying their

lesser status as well as their “inherent” criminality (Alexander, 2012; Blackmon, 2008; Davis, 2003).

The launch of the Civil Rights movement confirmed that Southern Whites had not liberated themselves from racist ideologies and discriminatory practices that characterized the South. White American citizens who fought against desegregation and equal rights during the movement were exercising the habitual judgments of their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents by arguing that African Americans did not deserve the same liberties as they did. Mississippi was considered a battleground for the Civil Rights movement with various tragedies transpiring during the fight for equality including the assassination of well-respected Civil Rights leader Medgar Evers in 1963, and the murder of three Civil Rights activists, James Earl Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael "Mickey" Schwerner, in 1964. Each of these murders were allegedly committed by White members of the Mississippi chapter of the Klu Klux Klan—a group of ultimate defenders of White supremacy.

In spite of the many lives lost and impaired by the fight for equality, major strides were made politically that eventually resulted in valuable socioeconomic changes for African Americans in the South (de Jong, 2005). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 officially “dismantled the Jim Crow system of discrimination in public accommodations, employment, voting, education, and federally financed activities” (Alexander, 2012, p. 38). Additionally, the Economic Opportunities Bill of 1964 was proposed with the intention of fighting the war on poverty (Alexander, 2012; de Jong, 2005). Soon after, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 passed, permitting African Americans the rights they had once been denied to contribute to political decisions that had significant effects on their lives (de Jong, 2005). As a result, the “percentage of African American adults registered to vote soared...in Mississippi [from] 6.7 to 66.5 percent,”

(Alexander, 2012, p. 38). Consequentially, more jobs became available, accessibility to education increased, and economic opportunities, in general, greatly improved (de Jong, 2005).

During the Civil Rights movement that was predominant in the South, another revolutionary group, the Black Panthers, developed on the west coast and in the North (Wendt, 2007). Unlike non-violent protestors who participated in sit-ins, marches, etc. in Southern states like Mississippi, Alabama, and South Carolina, the Black Panthers, headed by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, led a militant organization to fight for African American rights (Wendt, 2007). The Black Panther Party, however, fought specifically for African American communities' protection from police brutality, better educational and housing opportunities for the disadvantaged, and overall, demanded an end to Black racism (Wendt, 2007). Interestingly, the Party did not extend to the Southern region to the extent it did in the west and north, nor were there many groups with similar aggressive and radical tactics that surfaced in the South (See Deacons for Defense Justice).

Riche Richardson (2007) in her publication, *From Uncle Tom to Gangsta: Black Masculinity in the U.S. South*, presents an argument that may provide a greater understanding to why groups like the Black Panthers did not surface in the South facilitating comparable levels of change in race relations. Richardson (2007) discusses the role of geography in differing ideas of Black masculinity between the North and West and the South explaining how Black male southerners are viewed "...as inferior and undesirable models of Black masculinity within such hierarchies based on geography" (pp. 2-3). Her examination also includes scrutiny of judgments of southern Black males as submissive in comparison to attitudes of modern day Black males from the north and the west coast as more assertive. Furthermore, Richardson (2007) uses examples of the opposing tactics of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.,—a southern born and raised civil

rights activist who pushed for integration,—and Malcolm X,—a Black supremacist who preached for the separation of races,—to highlight how some may view King’s approach as “inadequate and inferior” in comparison to Malcolm X’s forceful and “authoritative” method (pp. 159, 162). Richardson’s (2007) analysis offers an alternate perspective on why Southern Black males chose to “stay in their place” and be less aggressive in their fight for equal opportunities, generally resulting in their political, economic, and social repression (p. 10). Moreover, the comparison, in theory, may permit us to believe that habitual judgments of southern Black males as inferior and inadequate have not only been intergenerationally impressed upon Whites, but have also been ingrained into the psyches of southern Black males themselves causing them to accept subordination and fulfill the destructive prophecies White supremacists set forth for them centuries ago.

Fulfilling the Prophecy

Although progress was made by the unwavering fight for equality by Black and White, non-violent and militant, integrationist and separatist Americans, alike, negative stereotypes and intergenerational habitual judgment toward African Americans endured and continue to manifest through policies that unfairly targeted many already disadvantaged Black communities (Alexander, 2012; Percival, 2009). Entering the 1970s, when integration was still in its infancy, many poor Black men and women fell victim to the government’s declaration of the War on Drugs (Alexander, 2012; Leary, 2005; Smith & Hattery, 2010; Wood, 2007). The War on Drugs nurtured the prison industrial complex, rapidly removing African American males from the home and community, filling prison beds, and acquiring “exploitable labor for the industries associated with the PIC” (Smith & Hattery, 2010, p. 390; Smith & Hattery, 2008). Smith and Hattery (2010) discuss the Rockefeller Drug Laws, policies that “set in motion the Three Strikes

Law...and a distinction between sentences for possession (or sale) of crack cocaine versus powder cocaine” (p. 390). Many scholars who have researched the policy changes and their subsequent effects on incarceration highlight the fact that crack cocaine is usually associated with poor Blacks, while powder cocaine use is thought to be more common amongst middle class and affluent Whites, suggesting that this modification was implemented—if not intentionally—in complete awareness of the adverse effects it would have on disadvantaged African American communities, reflecting poorly on Blacks as a whole (Alexander, 2012; Smith & Hattery, 2010).

The targeting of Black communities and the disproportionate incarceration rates among African American males is clearly a consequence of unequal social structures. Merton (1938) argues that society sets very specific goals for people, however, the means or ability to achieve those goals are stratified by socioeconomic class (Pfohl, 1994). When people are unequipped with the necessary means to attain socially prescribed goals, people feel stressed or strained, and deviance and crime is likely to occur as a result. Most incarcerated individuals hail from low socioeconomic circumstances (Kaufman et al., 2008; Smith & Hattery, 2010; Western & Pettit, 2010). In the state of Mississippi, where nearly 23 percent of its residents are living in poverty, and 32 percent of Black males are living below the poverty line, the likelihood of engaging in some form of crime, then, is significantly increased, producing a lopsided composition of prison inmates with African Americans comprising the larger portion (Hill, 2008).

Merton (1938) suggests that one method of coping with having inadequate resources and the inability to attain socially prescribed goals as simple as having a car, a home, and money in the bank, is to create your own opportunity. Merton (1938) refers to individuals that employ this mode of adaptation as “innovators.” Black males in Mississippi involved in the underground

market of drug and gun sales, theft (e.g., stealing cars, boosting), pimping, etc.—comparable to historical underground markets African Americans used to make a living or acquire extra money (e.g. bootlegging)—fall into the category of innovators. Interestingly enough, half of the incarcerated population in the U.S. is serving time for non-violent offenses, like drug sales, theft, and burglary, with most involving possession or intent to sale controlled substances (Alexander, 2012; Smith & Hattery, 2010; Spohn & Holleran, 2002).

Merton also introduces the concept of the “retreatist” as an individual who, like the innovator, does not have access to the means necessary for achieving socially prescribed goals, but instead of making a way (innovating), withdraw by using drugs or even committing suicide. Nevertheless, while drugs are found to be used by Whites at significantly higher rates than Blacks, and sold among Whites and Blacks, rich and poor, at very similar rates, drugs are only marketed as a substantial problem in poor Black communities like those found throughout Mississippi (Alexander, 2012; see also National Association for the Advancement of Colored People website). Again, it is the existence of such representations of African American males as drug dealers/users, and criminals, in general, that are consistently perpetuating stereotypes that buttress the types of judgment that manifest in decisions to implement particular policies adversely affecting already disadvantaged communities in various ways, including disproportionately incarcerating Black males (Alexander, 2012; Percival, 2009; Smith & Hattery, 2010).

Place Matters

A critical issue with the analysis of the symbiosis of poverty and crime and the potential upshot of imprisonment, however, is the lack of attention paid to places like Mississippi that are defined by undesirable stigmatization and characterized by rurality (Bassett, 2006; Eason, 2010; Richardson, 2007). Richardson (2007) briefly summarizes issues that have been momentous in the South's stigmatization:

“The adherence to slavery; the backlash against Reconstruction; the Supreme Court's legalization of the ‘Separate but Equal’ doctrine of 1896, inaugurating an era of ‘Jim Crow’ segregation that would only begin to be reversed with the *Brown v Board of Education* case in 1954; the perpetration of White-supremacist ideologies, racial terror, and violence, particularly lynching; and of course, in more recent history, the opposition to Black civil rights.” (Richardson, 2007, p. 9)

The South's stigmatization as a “problem” region in the United States because of events Richardson identifies, perhaps, has contributed to the reason many researchers and scholars decide against studying places like Mississippi. Not only does a negative stigma deem the state unattractive, but also highlighting the components that are creating and sustaining the problems associated with the state (e.g. poverty, racial tension, etc.) would—in the hopes of a researcher—provoke critical thought and inspire civic action to change circumstances for the better.

Richardson (2007) makes a powerful point arguing, “whatever fascination with Black rural southerners there has been in academia has in no way translated into an interest in and preoccupation with them as objects of social concern to address, for instance, the deplorable material conditions that many Blacks living in rural southern contexts have to face, such as the lack of access to public utilities, decent housing, jobs, health care, schools, etc.” (p. 126).

Unfortunately, though, if socioeconomic circumstances improve for the disadvantaged Black

population in Mississippi, it may very well compromise the social standing of Whites and disrupt what some people in the South still view as the “natural” racial and social order (Blackmon, 2008; Raza, 2011).

Personal Interest in Subject

As a young African American female from a disadvantaged socioeconomic background, I witnessed many of my family members—most importantly, my older brother—and an even greater number of my peers fall victim to the criminal justice system perpetuating a myriad of negative stereotypes toward Black men. Many of them were either gang affiliated and/or took part in underground markets of drug sells, pimping, boosting, etc. Few of them were sent to prison for life; several of them served their time, returned to our communities, and quickly resumed their criminal lifestyles without hesitation; most of them, however, came home with the intention of improving their quality of life by ceasing criminal behavior. Unfortunately, though, the incarceration experience severely tainted their chances at achieving the “American Dream” even further than those chances had already been constricted by our shared socioeconomic circumstances. The rejection these poor, often fatherless, undereducated Black males faced prior to incarceration only amplified once they re-entered our communities and attempted to successfully transition. I empathized with the males I witnessed come home wanting to simply start again and live their lives on the straight and narrow only to be excluded and alienated by mainstream society. From my extensive observation, I was inspired to study how race, class, social structures, and overall, social inequalities function in relation to crime and deviance amongst Black males who are, arguably, born with an immediate disadvantage as a result of America’s troubled racial history.

As a Southern Studies Master's student at the University of Mississippi, I developed a more sound understanding of marginalization and historical methods of racialized social control in the South that have translated into similar, albeit reformulated social structures contemporarily. I began to recognize the different ways in which race, class, and gender functioned in relation to crime in Southern spaces compared to Northwestern spaces I had originally witnessed. I discovered how severe the circumstances are for poor African Americans adversely affected by social inequalities in Mississippi. Furthermore, I was compelled to investigate social deviance and crime in Mississippi once I learned that the state has the second highest incarceration rate in the United States. More specifically, I decided to research how disturbing incarceration rates, and the overall incarceration experience, affects the lives of African American males and their families in Mississippi, particularly those from underprivileged socioeconomic backgrounds. For—as Gaston (1986) asserts—“destruction of the Black male also means destruction of the Black family” (p. 371).

I turned to Mississippi's history of race relations, social control methods, and referenced several sociological theories of crime and deviance with hopes of seeking answers about how mass incarceration and the socioeconomic conditions of African Americans in the state reciprocally influence each other debilitating the social mobility of disadvantaged Black communities. I found Judith Butler's concept, “habits of judgment,” to be useful in placing ideas about mass incarceration of Black males and the stagnant socioeconomic position of African Americans in Mississippi into an alternative perspective.

Purpose of Manuscript

There is profound significance in researching how the disproportionate incarceration of Black males and historical systems of social control in the South have contributed to the current

conditions of Mississippi's Black, namely male, residents. First, Mississippi is credited with playing a meaningful role in the fight for Civil Rights and desegregation. In fact, its role as a place of oppression, repression, and depression have contributed to the South's stigmatization as a "problem region." However, what is often not taken into consideration is that, although Mississippi's race relations have improved extensively, the circumstances of its Black residents remain poor. African Americans in Mississippi maintain a subordinate status politically, economically, educationally, and socially (Burd-Sharps, et al., 2009; Hill, 2008).

Additionally, because most studies of crime and poverty are conducted in urban contexts, locations like Mississippi, characterized by their rurality, are often ignored. Disregarding the existence of poverty and crime in predominantly rural places like Mississippi creates a level of invisibility for already disadvantaged Black communities (Bassett, 2006; Pettit, 2010; Richardson 2007). Invisibility not only makes it hard for outsiders to acknowledge concerning issues, but it also creates difficulty in recognizing the depth of the problems, which only leaves room for the possibility of additional problems to arise.

This manuscript will explore how the phenomenon of mass incarceration—itsself, a spawn of historical methods of racialized social control—has preserved and substantiated habits of judgment adversely affecting the social mobility of African American males in Mississippi. Using various sources of historical data, I will analyze, interpret, and formulate conclusions supporting my claim that the very intergenerational habits of judgment that sustained racialized methods of social control historically are continually being transmitted and can be recognized contemporarily through the mass incarceration of Black males in Mississippi. Consequently, Black males'—especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds—connections to the most essential institutions for preventing crime are weakening, harmfully affecting their

socioeconomic status, social mobility, and reinforcing a multiplicity of preconceived notions of Black males, namely, the typecast of criminal. With this research, I hope to illustrate 1.) how the issue of disproportionate Black male incarceration, and the uneven social structures that enable the constancy of the phenomenon in Mississippi, preserve and reinforce habits of judgment that are detrimental to the state's Black residents, and 2.) how the reinforcement of such habits function as debilitating factors to Mississippi's racial progress in totality.

Importantly, I will extensively examine habits of judgment toward African Americans in the South that have functioned as justification for, and contributed to the maintenance of Black males' subordinate socioeconomic status in Mississippi. I intend to explore the emergence of policies as a result of banished racialized social control methods that virtually mirror the regulations that have been outlawed, identifying judgmental patterns specifically attributed to race, place, and space. I will use sociological theories on crime and deviance combined with data obtained from questionnaires completed by representatives of the Mississippi Department of Corrections to support the argument that there is a strong, causal, reciprocal relationship between poverty and crime, especially detrimental in impoverished places like Mississippi. Furthermore, I will discuss how habits of judgment and high incarceration rates are injurious to the state's Black population's socioeconomic advancement.

Altogether, I underline how habitual judgments preserve stereotypes and allow stigmatizations of African Americans, the South, and Black males in the South to hold steady. I argue that the perceptions of Black males as criminal has and continues to transfer from one generation to the next contributing to the constant flow of Black male incarceration. Consequentially, African Americans in the South are continually marginalized, and remain virtually immobile socioeconomically (Western & Pettit, 2010). It is my goal to encourage others

to consider that the troubles of the Black population reflect largely on the South, on the state of Mississippi, and unfortunately, incapacitate the socioeconomic progress of the state's residents in its entirety.

Overview

The remainder of this manuscript will explore how mass incarceration and historical methods of racialized social control in the South have preserved and reinforced habits of judgment that adversely affect the social mobility of Black males in Mississippi. The following chapter will review literature and other discourse on mass incarceration and the methods of social control that led up to the phenomenon; the South and the role the region has assumed in the preservation of racist ideologies and racial tension; stigma and how it functions regionally and racially; social inequalities and socioeconomic status between Blacks and Whites in Mississippi; and, how representations of African American males in popular culture influence the implementation of public policies that unfairly and adversely affect Black males. Chapter 3 will present theories of crime and deviance that will be examined and proposed as possible explanations to the occurrence of crime among disadvantaged Black males in Mississippi. Chapter 4 will examine the methodology employed to conduct this research and outline how I analyzed the data gathered from questionnaires and available literature on related topics. Chapter 5 will address the results from my analysis of the questionnaires, literature, and other discourse. I will discuss my findings and what they indicate, theoretically, in Chapter 6. In addition, in Chapter 6, I will highlight how excessive negative representations of Black males in contemporary popular culture function to maintain unfavorable perceptions of African Americans and justify the implementation of policies that disproportionately affect underprivileged Black communities. Finally, I will propose ideas for future research, especially

in the area of reentry (the process of transitioning back into society after incarceration)—a growing topic that I believe deserves considerable attention.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The mass incarceration of Black males adversely affects the lives of African Americans throughout the United States. Excessive Black male incarceration is a phenomenon that has long existed, transpiring subsequent to the abolishment of slavery when White Southerners criminalized virtually every aspect of black life through the implementation of control systems such as Black Codes and Jim Crow. Over time, numerous public policies have been constructed that, similarly, criminalize Black life, resulting in even higher incarceration rates among Black males from disadvantaged communities, destructively effecting Black communities. While this pattern is consistent throughout the United States, it is prevalent in the South. Several theories have been introduced and explored in an attempt to justify the emergence and development of the latest phenomenon of mass incarceration,—especially in the South—including the rise of globalization in the 1970s and 1980s and the Prison Industrial Complex (Davis, 2003; Wood, 2007). Although research of mass incarceration cannot be done without recognizing the disproportionality throughout the correctional system, less research has been conducted on how the mass incarceration of Black males in the South contributes to the lack of socioeconomic development and inhibited social mobility of disadvantaged Black communities, particularly in a destitute location like Mississippi.

In this thesis, the role of historical methods of racialized social control in the contemporary overrepresentation of Black males in the penal system is explored. I posit that mass incarceration of Black males in the South is both an facilitator and consequence of the

preservation of stereotypical beliefs about African Americans and habitual judgment patterns practiced and reflected through public policy and popular culture that continue to substantially complicate the social mobility of disadvantaged African Americans in Mississippi. The following literature reviews support this hypothesis.

In an article by Smith and Hattery (2008), the segregative, exploitative, and capitalistic similarities between contemporary mass incarceration and slavery are examined. The authors employ the concept of the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) to explore the “complex configuration of the labor market, multi-national corporations, incarceration policies, and the inmate population that comprises the US prison system of the 21st century United States” (Smith & Hattery, 2008, p. 79). Importantly, Smith and Hattery (2008) investigate how Black males are treated as a source of exploitable labor and how the PIC “benefits from the mutually reinforcing systems of capitalism and racial domination in a manner similar to the slave plantation economy of the rural US South” (Smith & Hattery, 2008, p. 79; see also Oshinsky, 1996).

Smith and Hattery (2008) argue that prison labor during and after Reconstruction in the South became “a more significant part of modern capitalism” because slave labor was no longer a viable option. The authors claim that “prisons were built in the South as a part of the backlash to Black Reconstruction and as a mechanism to re-enslave Black workers” (Smith & Hattery, 2008, p. 4). The emergence and hasty expansion of the prison system worked in favor of White Southerners devastated by the end of slavery who not only had capitalist interest in mind, but also racial supremacist ideas to uphold (Raza, 2011; Smith & Hattery, 2008). The construction of Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman—a penal facility on 20,000 acres of farm land—was a discernible display of capitalistic desires to continue exploiting Black workhands by

criminalizing African Americans and forcing them to hard labor. Smith and Hattery (2008) insists that Parchman served two primary purposes: “social control and forced labor” (p. 4).

Contemporarily, a comparable system has developed with capitalist values, highly exploitative qualities, and segregative consequences, together, severely affecting the lives of African Americans, namely, males. Like many modern day scholars (Alexander, 2012; Garrison, 2011; Raza, 2011; Weatherspoon, 2007; Wood, 2007), Smith and Hattery (2008) highlight the commencement of the “War on Drugs” in the 1970s as a key factor in the rapid increase of African American arrests and incarceration rates. Acting much the same as Black Codes after the Civil War, drug policies implemented during the Reagan administration criminalized African Americans at alarming rates contributing to the upsurge of prison expansion and inmate populations (Alexander, 2012; Davis, 2003; Raza, 2011; Smith & Hattery, 2008; Wood, 2007).

The information noted in Smith and Hattery’s (2008) article indicate that the contemporary system of mass incarceration, which is disproportionately comprised of African American males, can be recognized as a new and improved method of racialized social control resembling the institution of slavery. Parallel tactics, including the formation and implementation of policies that knowingly affect African Americans—especially those from disadvantaged circumstances—have been employed to maintain an exploitable labor force that supports the prison industry while also preserving and reinforcing negative stereotypes of Black males as criminal. Smith and Hattery (2008) argue that “Just as bondage imposed ‘social death’ on imported African captives and their descendants, mass incarceration includes civic death for those it ensnares” (p. 9).

Correspondingly, Weatherspoon (2007) in his article, “The mass incarceration of African-American males: A return to institutionalized slavery, oppression, and

disenfranchisement of Constitutional rights,” discusses the mass incarceration of Black males and the resemblance to institutionalized slavery. Weatherspoon (2007) argues, “the mass incarceration of African American males is a system of involuntary servitude for life...[and] in the South has the effect of creating state slave plantations” (p. 1). These “slave plantations” can manifest in institutions like Parchman Farm where unexploitable labor (e.g. unemployable or unqualified Black males from underprivileged circumstances) becomes exploitable labor (i.e. prison laborers). The article examines the ways in which “the American justice system disenfranchises African-American males of their constitutional rights of liberty and equal justice, thus placing them in a system of de facto slavery” (Weatherspoon, 2007, p. 2).

Weatherspoon (2007) recognizes the current United States’ legal system as containing “remnants of the Black Codes in state and federal laws” (p. 3). In fact, Weatherspoon (2007) argues that Black Codes have been “reactivated” through federal statutes unfairly targeting, and harshly affecting poor African American males with limited socioeconomic opportunity (p. 3). Because contemporary policies have similar functions to Black Codes, they also have like consequences. The upshot is an overrepresentation of African American males in the criminal justice system—including incarcerated and exarcerated individuals living in U.S. communities under the supervision of the court, or those no longer being monitored, yet, living with a criminal stigma. Furthermore, “approximately 1.4 million African American males’ ability to vote in this country has been abridged temporarily or permanently”—a restriction eerily resembling the disenfranchisement and exclusion African Americans experienced historically (Weatherspoon, 2007; p. 5). Altogether, Weatherspoon’s (2007) research “reveal[s] how the American justice system has not only had a devastating impact on the social and economic status of African-American males, but also on their constitutional rights of freedom and justice” (p. 2).

Raza (2011), in his publication, “Legacies of the racialization of incarceration: From convict-lease to the prison industrial complex,” explores the mass incarceration of African American males from a slightly different angle arguing that “anti-black racism has been re-instituted in the current era of incarceration” (p. 159). Raza (2011) uses the state of Georgia—a location also in the top ranks for incarceration rates—to support his argument that the post-emancipation criminal justice system, including the workings of the convict-lease system, has significantly influenced the current condition of incarceration in the United States. The article is divided into three sections with Raza, first, discussing the current state of the prison system, second, exploring the historical connections of racialized methods of social control (e.g. slavery, Black Codes, and convict-leasing) to the rise of the prison system and its disproportionality, and third, examining the emergence and growth of the prison industrial complex.

Raza’s (2011) examination uncovers an observable resemblance between the “social and economic functions of slavery” and the social and economic functions of the current mass incarceration of disproportionate numbers of African Americans (p. 159). He argues that large corporations benefit from mass incarceration through the PIC by explaining how “The State secures employment for communities where prisons are held; private corporations profit from the construction and maintenance of prisons; and both profit from extracted prison labor” (p. 167). Weaver and Purcell (1998) in their article, “The Prison Industrial Complex: A modern justification for African enslavement,” correspondingly argue that the primary basis for the PIC are 1.) race-neutral statutes that disproportionately impact blacks, 2.) general societal discrimination that contaminates decisions by government officials, 3.) the profit motives behind the privatization of prisons (p. 364). They also underline how lucrative of a business the expansion of prison privatization has become and insist that the Thirteenth Amendment

strengthens the PIC because it permits forced labor as a punishment for crime (pp. 359-360). Raza (2011) also highlights the social damages imprisonment inflicts upon African Americans. One of the greatest issues African Americans experience as a result of imprisonment is disenfranchisement, similar to the disenfranchisement they faced for decades prior to the commencement of the Civil Rights movement. Raza (2011) insists that “felony convictions and exclusionary citizenship laws explicitly function to prevent African Americans from the political process” (p. 161).

An apparent limitation of this analysis is that it is specific to the state of Georgia, a location that has significantly evolved economically, unlike Mississippi. Furthermore, Raza (2011) focuses on African Americans as a whole, and does not emphasize the enhanced detriment of “recycled” policies on disadvantaged Black populations. Even further, Raza (2011) does not discuss prison privatization and its predominance in the South, which can also be linked and “understood as part of the legacies of social and economic functions of slavery” that he discussed throughout the article (p. 159). Nevertheless, Raza’s (2011) exploration of the post-emancipation criminal justice system and its influence on the current state of incarceration offers a helpful explanation of history’s role in the business of the penal system.

David Oshinsky (1996), in his distinguished publication, *Worse than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice*, provides a detailed description of convict-leasing, the development of Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman (or simply, Parchman), and the ways in which Southern White attitudes facilitated the conservation of black male exploitation. Oshinsky’s (1996) account of Parchman and convict-leasing reveals how White racial attitudes toward African Americans in the South were reinforced by the excessive and unjust criminalization of Black males. Following Oshinsky (1996), Douglas Blackmon (2008)

published *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*, also highlighting the disturbing operation of the convict-lease system including the unsanitary living and fatal working conditions leased inmates were subjected to, as well as the severe and relentless brutality inmates endured. Blackmon's (2008) analysis offered an additional perspective at the judgments held by Whites in the South toward African Americans, and how those judgments were contributory to the inhumane treatment they experienced in convict-leasing. Both texts reveal how black males were unjustly and disproportionately criminalized and incarcerated as a result of the enforcement of Black Codes and stereotypes that had been transmitted over time.

Professor of law and civil rights advocate, Michelle Alexander (2012), author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, presents a compelling argument about the way discriminatory practices that were employed historically to create and enforce racial separation have been transmitted over time and contemporarily materialize through public policies that negatively affect poor people of color. Alexander (2012) argues that the criminal justice system today, like the Jim Crow system of the early to mid-twentieth century, is producing and maintaining a social caste system in which black and brown people are stagnantly located at the bottom. Policies like the Anti-Drug Abuse Act passed in 1986 that initially presented the disparities in sentencing for drug crimes—implemented to sturdily fight the “War on Drugs,” the war on poverty, and aid in the get tough on crime approach—knowingly target Black males from low socioeconomic backgrounds, leading to disproportionate arrests and incarceration rates (Garrison, 2011; Smith & Hattery, 2010). Put simply, Alexander (2012) argues, “Like Jim Crow (and slavery), mass incarceration operates as a tightly networked system of laws, policies, customs, and institutions that operate collectively to ensure the subordinate

status of a group defined largely by race,” (p. 13). Western and Pettit (2010) concur asserting, “America’s prisons and jails have produced a new social group, a group of social outcasts who are joined by the shared experience of incarceration, crime, poverty, racial minority, and low education. As an outcast group, the men and women in our penal institutions have little access to the social mobility available to the mainstream. Social and economic disadvantage, crystallizing in penal confinement, is sustained over the life course and transmitted from one generation to the next” (p. 8).

Percival (2009) conducted a study questioning how racial attitudes “impact states’ propensity to incorporate ‘softer’ prisoner rehabilitation services into their correctional systems,” (p. 176). While his focus is primarily on rehabilitation services for ex-offenders, Percival (2009) thoroughly explores the ways in which “Whites’ negative attitudes towards African Americans leads to greater support for punitive crime policies...[and] have a disproportionately negative impact on the African American community” (p. 177). Throughout his discussion, Percival (2009) highlights the ways in which White racial attitudes and stereotypes toward African Americans shape harsher perceptions of Blacks in the context of crime (p. 179). Percival (2009) also explains that common White stereotypes involve the perception of African Americans as a violent underclass more prone to criminal activity (p. 179). As a result, policy-makers aim to express their concern for public safety by showing “greater support for harsher treatments” of offenders (p. 179).

Percival (2009) found that “...states in which whites are less tolerant toward African Americans, state prisoners are less likely to receive rehabilitation services” (p. 176). A scarcity of rehabilitative resources increases the likelihood of a return to crime and recidivism seemingly confirming Whites’ negative perceptions of African Americans as an underclass prone to

criminal activity. Percival's (2009) analysis, however, does not consider how racial attitudes have been molded based on a states' cultural history, which, in the case of Mississippi—a location with a profound history of troubling race relations—may provide a different perspective on Whites' racial attitudes.

In Mississippi, poverty and low socioeconomic status has been, and continues to be linked to the remnants of racialized social control methods of the past (Gray, 1991). In the article, "Economic development and African Americans in the Mississippi Delta," Gray (1991) contends that the Delta—an area heavily populated by Blacks living below the poverty line—has remained a destitute location lacking in social and economic development as a result of racial conflict dating back to slavery (p. 238). Gray (1991) explains, "racial conflict and social control are associated with the subordination and exploitation of Blacks by Whites in the US and the South, particularly the Mississippi Delta, (Gray, 1991, p. 240). Gray (1991) argues, "these conflicts show how racism can be functional in stigmatizing blacks as inferior so that exploitation of blacks can be readily justified," (p. 240). To defend her argument, Gray employs a functionalist theory, suggesting that the stability of the social and economic immobility in the Mississippi Delta is both manifest (intended) and latent (unintended) (p. 239). Its manifest function of "...exploiting, ignoring, and paternalistically keeping African Americans in poverty in the Delta creates and maintains cheap labor" (Gray, 1991, p. 244). Furthermore, the manifest function of controlling the means of production in the Delta keeps capitalist in power and in dominant positions (Gray, 1991, p. 244). Gray (1991) also insists the power-conflict theory can be used to understand the "extreme racial stratification and maintenance of White dominance in the Delta region," arguing that it "has a racist social structure which is functional for the White dominant social class and resists social and economic change (Gray, 1991, p. 239). Gray (1991)

concludes, “racial conflict, aggression, and hostilities are part of the dominant groups’ strategy to keep its status and power intact,” (p. 240).

One limitation to Gray’s (1991) discussion is the disregard of other equally disadvantaged Black communities of Mississippi. Although the Mississippi Delta is, in fact, a terribly destitute location that never fully recovered from the devastation caused by a loss of slave labor at the close of the Civil War, there are a multitude of places like this in Mississippi and throughout the South. However, the snapshot of this particular region does present a clear picture of the impairment of a large group of people as a consequence of racism, social inequalities, stratification, and immobility.

In her celebrated publication, *“From Uncle Tom to Gangsta: Black Masculinity and the U.S. South,”* Riche Richardson (2007) addresses how and why the South has been stigmatized as a “problem” region, and explains how the image of the Southern Black male has been molded and represented with disdain. Drawing on the analysis of multiple genres of popular culture including distinguished literary works, films, and even contemporary rap and hip hop music, Richardson (2007) argues that the image of the Southern Black male has always been portrayed as violent and criminal (p. 4). Despite the aggressive undertone of such labels, however, there has been a consistent characterization of “black masculinity in the South as cowardly, counterrevolutionary, infantile, and emasculated,” (Richardson, 2007, p. 6). The effects of intersecting stigmas merely add to the alienation of black males in Mississippi, especially, those from disadvantaged socioeconomic circumstances causing them to be further disconnected from social institutions important to their individual and collective development (Cattarello, 2000; Hirschi, 1969; Kaufman et al., 2008; Shaw & McKay, 1942).

Richardson (2007) explains that “the South as a ‘problem’ region has functioned historically as a site of ambivalent and conflicted identification for many African Americans in light of traumas associated with the region, which exacerbates the legacy of the South as politically, economically, and socially repressive” (p. 10). The repression that Richardson (2007) highlights can be identified in education and employment disparities that subsequently generate crime throughout disadvantaged communities in Mississippi. However, as Richardson (2007) contends, the stigmatized reputation the region and its inhabitants have earned has deemed them unattractive and discredited. As a result of its negative reputation, the critical problems of the South (i.e. social, economic, political, etc.) and the adverse effects of these problems on citizens of the region, especially in destitute rural areas, is discussed marginally in academia. Poor Black Southerners and their socioeconomic conditions, particularly Mississippians, are virtually ignored in scholarly conversations deepening their marginality (Richardson, 2007).

Taken together, these works exhibit a pattern between historical methods of racialized social control—that were not only prevalent in the South, but also instrumental in the construction of negative stereotypes toward African Americans—and the contemporary phenomenon of mass incarceration (Alexander, 2012; Blackmon, 2008; Raza, 2011; Smith & Hattery, 2008; Weatherspoon, 2007; Wood, 2007). It is important to understand how race, place, and social status influence habits of judgment, for judgment is such an integral part of criminal justice processes. It can be assumed from these literature reviews that habits of judgment and racial attitudes formed historically have survived the test of time and found a secure place in contemporary American society playing a major role in the current state of incarceration.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Historical methods of racialized social control were justified by White racial stereotyping that, both permitted the viability of slavery, Black Codes, Jim Crow, and convict-leasing, thereby reinforced the ideology of racial supremacy. The most recent phenomenon of mass incarceration—which is also a highly racialized system—has been sustained in a like manner by the preservation of age-old typecasts of African Americans that facilitate habits to judge Black males as criminal. The overwhelming presence of Black males ensnared in the penal system fortifies the relationship in people’s minds between criminality and race to the extent that it is seen—or “confirmed”—as an innate characteristic. Moreover, with the South comprising so much of the United States’ African American population, the cementation of criminality and blackness is amplified in the minds of many White Southerners and influential to White racial attitudes and judgments toward Blacks.

Sociological theories of crime offer alternative explanations for crime and deviant behavior that are not based solely on race. Sociological theories of crime and deviance take into consideration social interactions and social processes that work together to stimulate the occurrence of crime to best explain when, where, and why crime is likely to occur. There are myriad theories that present sound arguments about when, why, and where crime can be predicted. The theories discussed subsequently have the potential of rationalizing high rates of crime among underprivileged African American males in Mississippi. Understanding how a combination of social factors function to inspire or deter crime will possibly challenge White

opinions regarding criminal behavior as an inherent black trait, having the potential to alter habits of judgment.

Merton's Structural Strain Theory

Merton's (1938) theory of structural strain offers one explanation to the high rates of crime among African American males in the state of Mississippi. As briefly discussed, Merton (1938) argued that with economic resources so scarce to the lower classes, and limited access to legitimate means to attain socially mandated goals bound by class and status, the resulting strain produces anomie among those who are locked out of the legitimate opportunity structures. Members of the lower classes, as a result, may turn to deviant solutions to their socioeconomic quandaries. Merton's (1938) theory suggests that there are five social modes of adaptation to goals and means:

1. Conformity: "Conformity occurs when individuals both embrace conventional social goals and also have the means at their disposal to attain them. The conformist desires wealth and success and can obtain them through education and a high paying job. In a balanced, stable society, this is the most common social adaptation. If a majority of its people did not practice conformity, the society would cease to exist" (Siegel, 2009, p. 176; also see Merton, 1938, p. 676).
2. Innovation: "Innovation occurs when an individual accepts the goals of society but rejects or is incapable of attaining them through legitimate means. Many people desire material goods and luxuries but lack the financial ability to attain them. The resulting conflict forces them to adopt innovative solutions to their dilemma: they steal, sell drugs, or extort money. Of the five adaptations, innovation is most closely associated with criminal behavior" (Siegel, 2009, p. 176; also see Merton, 1938, p. 678).

3. Ritualism: “Ritualists are less concerned about accumulating wealth and instead gain pleasure from practicing traditional ceremonies regardless of whether they have a real purpose or goal. The strict set of manners and customs in religious orders, feudal societies, clubs, and college fraternities appeal to ritualists. Ritualists should have the lowest level of criminal behavior because they have abandoned the success goal, which is at the root of criminal activity” (Siegel, 2009, p. 176; also see Merton, 1938, p. 678).
4. Retreatism: “Retreatists reject both the goals and the means of society. Merton suggests that people who adjust in this fashion are “in the society but not of it.” Included in this category are “psychotics, psychoneurotics, chronic autists, pariahs, outcasts, vagrants, vagabonds, tramps, chronic drunkards, and drug addicts.” Because such people are morally or otherwise incapable of using both legitimate and illegitimate means, they attempt to escape their lack of success by withdrawing—either mentally or physically” (Siegel, 2009, p. 176; also see Merton, 1938, p. 677).
5. Rebellion: “Rebellion involves substituting an alternative set of goals and means from conventional ones. Revolutionaries who wish to promote radical change in the existing social structure and who call for alternative lifestyles, goals, and beliefs are engaging in rebellion. Rebellion may be a reaction against a corrupt and hated government or an effort to create alternate opportunities and lifestyles within the existing system” (Siegel, 2009, p. 176; also see Merton, 1938 & Pfohl, 1994).

According to Merton (1938), innovation is the mode most likely to lead to crime, followed by retreatism. Drug dealers, gun smugglers, pimps, prostitutes, thieves, and other groups involved in underground markets are categorized as innovators. Because of the scarcity and inaccessibility of

economic resources, innovators must invent their own methods or means to attain socially mandated goals, which are most often illegitimate.

With such an alarming number of uneducated and unemployable men, in addition to an already inadequate job market, there is powerful incentive to seek alternative avenues to earn money. Individuals who decide to participate in underground markets see innovative means as the best option for progress. Their decisions often lead to arrests and incarceration, instigating the perpetuation of pre-conceived notions of Black males as crooks and criminals. Unfortunately, although these men inappropriately choose criminal paths to “success,” the effects of socioeconomic disadvantage are not necessarily taken into consideration when others attempt to rationalize the motives leading to crime. Merton (1938) affirms that “by acknowledging that society unfairly distributes the legitimate means to achieving success, anomie theory helps explain the existence of high-crime areas and the apparent predominance of delinquent and criminal behavior among the lower class” (Siegel, 2009, pp. 176-77).

Social Bond/Social Control Theory

Travis Hirschi’s (1969) social bond/social control theory of crime may also provide insight on the greater frequency of criminal behavior among Black males in Mississippi. Hirschi’s (1969) social bond theory suggests that all criminal behavior requires some form of motivation. Hirschi (1969) believed that the social bonds we maintain control our behavior when we are tempted to engage in deviant behavior. When we are closely connected or tied to social bonds (e.g. family, teachers, jobs, community, etc.), we are less likely to commit crimes and risk weakening or breaking those bonds (Pratt, Gau, & Franklin, 2011).

Hirschi (1969) argued that it is because of our bonds to prosocial people (i.e. family), prosocial institutions (i.e. education), and prosocial values, that we choose to behave in a

prosocial manner (i.e acting in a manner which displays care or concern for others) (Pratt et al., 2011). If our social bonds are strong, we are more likely to manage our innate “hedonistic drives” and behave civilly; if our social bonds are weak, we are more likely to choose to engage in deviant or criminal activities because we are not committed or attached to, involved or believe in prosocial values, people, or institutions (Pratt et al., 2011). Therefore, Black males who are deprived of a quality education, profitable employment, and do not have valuable resources available to assist them in coping with the stress related to such deficiencies, lack concrete connections to such institutions and find it easier to drift into deviant activities and lifestyles (Powell, 2008, p. 314).

Social Ecology/Social Disorganization

Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (1942) conducted a study analyzing the “ecological distribution of delinquency” finding that “certain ecological areas...were consistently characterized by the highest rates of delinquency...and that the areas highest in delinquency were also highest in number of assumed indicators of social disorganization” (Pfohl, 1994, pp. 190-191; also see Siegel, 2009). Shaw and McKay (1942) identify indicators of social disorganization as things like “high percentage[s] of nonwhites, low percentage[s] of home ownership, high percentage[s] of families on relief, and low median income” (Pfohl, 1994, p. 191). Shaw and McKay (1942) argued that since “high-delinquency areas were also ‘low income areas, where there is the greatest deprivation and frustration,’” perhaps, “‘crime...may be regarded as one of the means employed by people to acquire...the economic and social values generally idealized in our culture, which persons in other circumstances acquire by conventional means’” (Pfohl, 1994, p. 191).

Shaw and McKay (1969) also “believed that neighborhood-level ecological conditions and informal social control networks influenced delinquency by affecting individuals’ social bonds such as family and the school as well as peer associations” (Cattarello, 2000, p. 35). With much of Mississippi characterized by destitute rural communities, highly concentrated with poor African Americans, it is possible that Shaw and McKay’s (1942) theory may help us understand the high rates of crime and incarceration among Black males as a result of environmental influences as well as disconnections from vital institutions.

Societal Reaction Perspective: Labeling Theory

Erving Goffman’s (1963) text, *Stigma*, offers a theory attempting to explain why individuals deviate from conventional behaviors and choose to commit crime. Goffman’s (1963) philosophy of stigma is categorized as a labeling theory that functions to provide a better understanding of how society reacts to deviants and criminals. Goffman (1963) posits that there are three different types of stigma: “abominations of the body,” “blemishes of individual character perceived as weak will, domineering or unnatural passions treacherous and rigid beliefs, and dishonesty,” and “tribal stigma of race, nation, and religion” (p. 4). Imprisonment, unemployment, addiction, and unemployment are among the examples Goffman employs to treat the idea of character stigmatization. However, for the population of males being discussed here, multiple blemishes of individual character may be identified adding to the racial stigma they are subjected to. Goffman (1963) explains that based on the assumption that stigmatized peoples are less “normal,” they experience “varieties of discrimination” and are perceived as inferior, even dangerous (p. 5). As a result of these pejorative perceptions, their life chances are reduced; we observe the truth of this concept in the fate of disproportionate numbers of African American males who become ensnared within the penal system.

Adding to Goffman's (1963) stigma theory, Pfohl (1994) informs, "the labeling process sets boundaries between those who are acceptable and those who are condemned, between insiders and outsiders, between conventional people and deviants" (p. 347). People in positions of power have the authority to label the powerless deeming them deviant when powerless populations are not afforded the same opportunities to conform to societal conventions set forth by people of power (Pfohl, 1994). Those who are unable to meet societal expectations are stigmatized and "cast into roles which constrain their abilities to manage positive impressions of themselves" (Pfohl, 1994, p. 354).

The labeling concept, then, may partially explain the plight of African American males in Mississippi, particularly those from disadvantaged circumstances, and those who drift into criminal lifestyles. Black males, already negatively labeled in myriad ways, are stigmatized further as Mississippians, and even further as poor or underprivileged Mississippians. Pfohl (1994) argues that "perceptual bias of social control agents (i.e. race, ethnicity, gender, social class, age, religion, physical appearance) influence one's chances of being caught [committing a nonconforming act] and officially labeled a deviant" (pp. 361). The characteristics that make these individuals or groups stand out—whether it is their race, the neighborhood they live in, or the way they dress—makes them more or less visible to the watchful eyes of control agents (Pfohl, 1994).

Pfohl (1994) discusses an idea regarding "situational dynamics of labeling" that describes how "dynamics which when converted into official statistics distort and confuse the nature and extent of the deviance problem" (pp. 361-362). The disproportionate mass incarceration of Black males is a prime example of situational dynamics of labeling. Because African American men are so profoundly represented in the penal system, it creates a fear and belief in the public that

being Black and being a criminal is synonymous (Alexander, 2012). It may also lead society to believe that if one hails from an underprivileged Black neighborhood, he is likely to engage in criminal behavior. This often causes police presence to be greater in such locations, and chances for racial profiling to occur, increasing the rates of arrest and incarceration amongst disadvantaged African American males (Garrison, 2011).

Although these theories are not always accepted, they have been ubiquitously recognized as plausible explanations for crime and deviance. It is important to acknowledge that while the discussed theories are principally based on structure, individual agency plays a significant role in committing or abstaining from crime. Structural strain, ecological/environmental influences, and weak social bonds may influence one's behavior, but they, alone, do not regulate the ultimate decision to act deviantly or criminally.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

This study examines how “habits of judgment” continue to sustain judgmental patterns that justified historical methods of control in Mississippi have contributed to the perpetual criminalization of Black males resulting in their overrepresentation in Mississippi correctional facilities and works to effectively stunt the social and economic mobility of African Americans in the state. A mixed methods approach was employed to investigate the relationship, if any, between the repercussions of slavery, Black Codes, convict-leasing, and Jim Crow on the disproportionate mass incarceration of Black males in the state of Mississippi.

Research Design

Primarily, I employ a sociohistorical research design in order to understand the social processes at work. I read a multitude of works including, but not limited to, scholarly articles and books regarding connections between historical methods of social control and the current state of mass incarceration, the history of the south, and sociological theories of crime. I also reviewed data and analysis of United States Census reports, data from the Sentencing Project, statistics provided by my contact at the Mississippi Department of Corrections as well as public information located on the MDOC website. In my investigation, I located recurring themes and common assumptions about age-old methods of social control in Mississippi and unveil how historical patterns influence the current trend of excessive Black male incarceration. Additionally, I administered questionnaires to professional employees from the Mississippi

Department of Corrections (MDOC) to gather details on the inmate population and their social and economic conditions prior to and after incarceration. My intention was to evaluate each source and identify relationships between recurring concepts among them.

Subjects

Professionals employed by the Mississippi Department of Corrections including, but not limited to parole and probation officers, field officers, counselors, and inmate-program instructors, have a unique insight on common reasons individuals are incarcerated, individual and/or social factors that affect the prison experience, and how the combination of those factors may or may not complicate an offender's ability to reenter society. Parole officers generally assume the responsibility of supervising released inmates as they complete the remainder of their sentence in the community. Therefore, they are well informed about the environment the offender will be released into and are usually equipped with information regarding economic opportunities for the incarcerated to pursue. Field officers tend to conduct non-office based work including, but not limited to supervising probationers and parolees as they complete community work hours, building relationships with community groups, and identifying opportunities/sites for community work placements. Pre-Release counselors work closely with inmates preparing them for release taking into consideration the environment and circumstances to which the offender will return, as well as concerns the inmate may have about reentry. Academic teachers work more intimately with inmates and thus have greater potential at developing more profound understandings of their personal strengths and weaknesses expressed through academic performance and participation.

For the purposes of this study, I recruited several representatives of the Mississippi Department of Corrections to answer a brief questionnaire regarding the offender population they

work with and common issues with the reentry process including pre-prison experiences, in-prison experiences, post-release experiences. Because of restraints presented by the Mississippi Department of Corrections, only field officers, academic teachers, pre-release counselors, and a branch director were able to participate in the research process. Also, due to the time frame in which I preferred to conduct personal interviews, my contact at the MDOC expressed a desire to circulate the interview questions to employees via email being that she could not provide me with their personal information. As a result of these restrictions, my research process was limited to written communication with the few employees who agreed to participate.

Instrumentation

I constructed a group of questions for employees to answer in an attempt to reveal—through data analysis and reduction—how the criminalization of Black males has been perpetuated through social structures assembled as a result of historical control methods in Mississippi. I initially compiled twenty questions to ask MDOC employees in personal interviews. However, due to the change in research method (emailed responses instead of face-to-face interviews), I chose a total of eight questions to administer regarding Mississippi's prison populace, including but not limited to the socioeconomic backgrounds of inmates, particular elements of the prison experience, reentry, and causes of recidivism. I electronically delivered the questionnaires to my contact at the MDOC as requested. In turn, she distributed the questionnaires to the MDOC participants subsequently.

The first two questions were designed for the participant to be able to simply check boxes next to the corresponding answer. Question one inquired about the participant specifically, requesting that they identify their sex (i.e. male, female), race (i.e. Black, White, Hispanic, Asian, or other), and the length of time on their job with the MDOC. The second question asked

the participant to identify the largest population group they typically worked with including age (i.e., 18-35, 36-50, 51-64, 65 and up), race (i.e., Black, White, Hispanic, Asian or other), socioeconomic status (i.e., low \$0-24,999, mid \$25,000-44,999, upper \$50,000-64,999, or other), and offender classification (i.e., violent or non-violent). These measures were used to discover criminogenic commonalities, or lack thereof, amongst offender populations and their relation, if any, to the types of crimes committed. The remaining six questions were open-ended for the purpose of allowing respondents to incorporate their own unguided opinions on the reciprocal effects of incarceration and social processes. I hoped to find information in existing literature regarding historical methods of racialized social control in Mississippi that could provide explanations to enhance our current understanding of the development of social structure and policies that adversely affect Black males in the state inspiring them to engage in criminal activity.

Data Collection Procedures

As a requirement of the University of Mississippi, I applied for permission to conduct research with the Mississippi Department of Correction in search of information for my upcoming manuscript. I was instructed to complete an application with the University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The application required my completion of a questionnaire and a detailed proposal for my research to ensure that any human subjects involved would be treated ethically with their rights adequately protected. I provided the IRB with a brief project summary, a copy of the questionnaires that would be administered to the participants, and a consent form to be signed by the participants.

I also made contact with multiple people of various titles within the Mississippi Department of Corrections before finding the appropriate person in a position to help with my

research. I searched the MDOC website for contact information of people who could possibly assist. After numerous phone calls and emails, I was put in contact with the Special Projects Officer and the Systems Manager who would guide me through the succeeding process. I initially told both MDOC representatives the purpose and goal of my research and specified who I hoped to interview. The Special Projects Officer then prompted me to send a copy of the questions I planned to administer to the interviewees. After several weeks of waiting for a response, the Special Projects Officer contacted me informing me that my request to conduct research within the MDOC was in the process of being approved. She also informed me that it would be easier for the department representatives to simply answer my questions via email instead of face-to-face interviews. With time constraints as they were at the time, I agreed that email correspondence would be a wise choice. After over two months of correspondence, my research was approved with the Mississippi Department of Corrections. The Special Projects Officer distributed the questionnaires I constructed to a combination of 20 field, probation, and parole officers. Of the 20, 11 participated in completing the questionnaires.

For the sociohistorical element of my research, I collected and evaluated various sorts of resources in search of recurring themes and common assumptions about the social, economic, and political repercussions of racialized social control methods of Mississippi's past and the contemporary manifestations of those consequences by way of the mass incarceration of Black males. Data from the United States Census Bureau, The Sentencing Project, and the Mississippi Department of Corrections were used for statistical comparisons to other available literature (e.g. journal articles, books, etc.) related to the topic of mass incarceration, the prison experience, and reentry. The questionnaires were used as comparative tools to make inferences regarding similar or differing opinion-based explanations for the disproportionate incarceration of Black males in

Mississippi, and to seek professional opinions about effective methods that can be employed to reduce Black male prison entry and recidivism rates.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS

Before conducting this study, I hypothesized that mass incarceration facilitates the maintenance of habitual judgment patterns, which materialize through popular culture and public policies, and as a result, adversely affect the socioeconomic status and social mobility of African American males in the state of Mississippi. I postulated that the social effects of incarceration, such as disconnections from institutions of power, negative representations in popular culture, stigmatization and alienation upon release—especially for Black males from disadvantaged communities—permit debilitating stereotypes to endure influencing the way others view African Americans negatively affecting their social status. Negative judgments of Black males reinforced by criminal representation in popular culture and official statistics are embedded in policies that are rather damaging to the socioeconomic progression of the Black population in Mississippi. The mass incarceration of disproportionate numbers of African American males in Mississippi—amongst myriad other factors—is crippling the states' disadvantaged Black population's ability to move upward.

The historical and qualitative research findings support my hypothesis revealing that mass incarceration is churning out nearly identical social effects as historical methods of racialized social control, thus, preserving incapacitating beliefs and opinions about African Americans. The historical marginalization of Black people in the state of Mississippi has left the Black population in an almost stagnant socioeconomic condition over the past few decades. The result is perpetual marginalization, inadequate education, lack of occupational opportunity, high rates

of crime, high arrest rates, and disproportionately high incarceration rates. Additionally, my findings suggest that the invisibility suffered as a consequence of regional stigma, as well as the invisibility of the cumulative effects of incarceration, allow for partial judgments to be made toward Black males in Mississippi, further complicating their ability to progress socially and economically.

Furthermore, the multiple ways in which Black males are negatively represented in official statistics, as well as in popular culture, creates fear in the public and encourages policymakers to enforce regulations that disproportionately affect poor African Americans (Percival, 2009). There is a cyclical nature of poverty, crime, and stigmatization for African Americans in Mississippi that fuels the preservation of, and—perhaps, for some—substantiates, judgmental patterns that linger and materialize through popular culture and public policies. The social effects of mass incarceration are not only extremely detrimental to African American males in Mississippi, but they are injurious to the Black population as a whole, and disadvantageous to the state in its entirety.

The questionnaires completed by representatives of the Mississippi Department of Corrections (MDOC) revealed significant information about the subsequent effects of incarceration that contribute to the maintenance of judgmental patterns practiced by political leaders and state employers. Responses to the questionnaires indicate that the primary reasons for incarceration and recidivism are inability to gain employment, lack of education, stigma, ecological/neighborhood influences, and an overall disconnection from vital institutions. Mississippi Department of Corrections representatives offered their personal opinions about the negative effects policies have on African American male offenders' abilities to successfully transition back into society and alter pre-conceived notions about their "inherent" criminality.

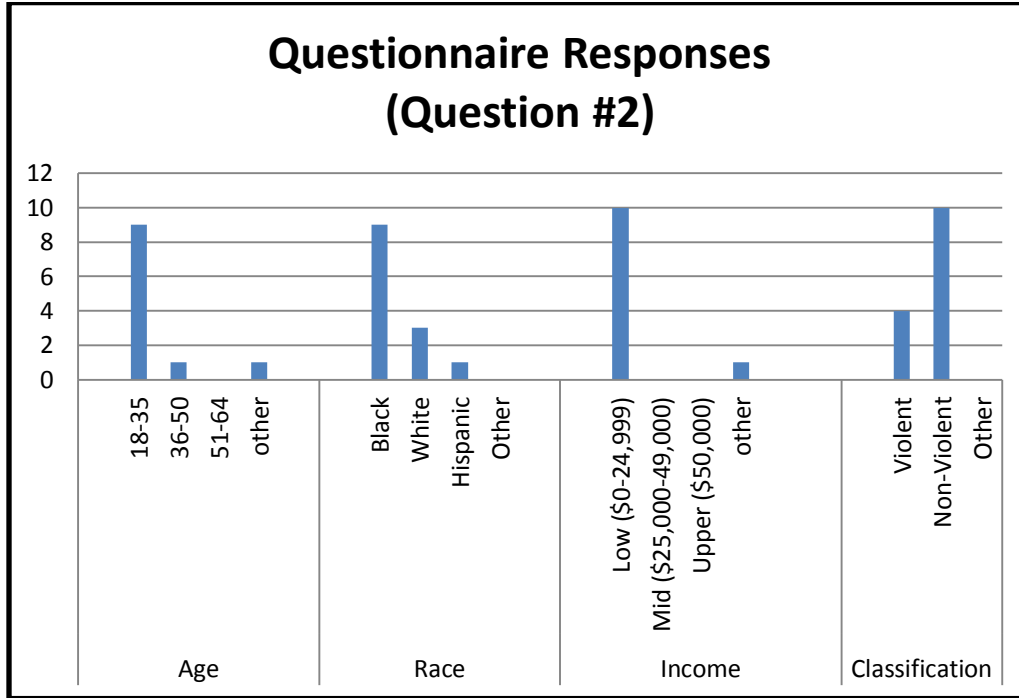
This section will present the findings from research questionnaires administered to employees of the MDOC. I will identify recurring themes among respondents' testimonies and buttress those themes with corresponding literature and statistical data. Presentation of these results will be followed by a discussion to place findings into context.

Findings

As predicted, the largest group of the inmates and ex-offenders with which MDOC representatives worked were African American males, between the ages of 18 and 35 from low socioeconomic backgrounds (see Table 1). Nine of the eleven MDOC representatives worked primarily with African Americans; ten out of eleven worked with the age group of 18 through 35; and, ten out of eleven worked primarily with inmates from low-socioeconomic backgrounds.

Ten out of the eleven MDOC respondents confirmed that the largest group with whom they worked was inmates classified as non-violent. A fact sheet provided by a MDOC programmer indicated that of the (roughly) 23,000 prison inmates (jail inmates not included) as of April 2013, 63 percent of them were African American male (see Appendix B). The figures in Appendix G reveal that more than half of the (approximately) 14,000 African American male inmates are serving time for nonviolent offenses. Nearly 30 percent of the nonviolent population is serving sentences for drug related crimes (see Appendix G). Although I had not specifically hypothesized that the majority of Black male offenders would be classified as non-violent, I did suppose that a great deal of them would be non-violent offenders based on the abundance of literature reporting statistics of non-violent criminality among African American males in general (Alexander, 2012; Garrison, 2011; Raphael, 2011).

Table 1



Note: Some respondents checked multiple boxes to accurately identify the groups with whom they most frequently work.

Table 1

Most of the Mississippi Department of Corrections representatives who participated in the questionnaire process found disconnections or inaccessibility to institutions of power to be primary causes of criminal behavior. Of the eleven MDOC representatives, each of them expressed a belief that lack of employment, or inadequate employment inspired crime before incarceration and subsequent to an inmate's release. Nine of the respondents indicated stigma as an injurious social effect of incarceration. Eight MDOC respondents found lack of education to be a major factor in inmates' decisions to commit crime before and after imprisonment. Seven respondents emphasized the importance of family and community attachments prior to incarceration, while imprisoned, and subsequent to one's release. Finally, seven of the eleven

MDOC representatives found environmental influences to be predictors of criminal behavior and recidivism. These findings will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

Education

Mississippi Department of Corrections respondents insist that education plays a significant role in individual's decisions to commit crime. Of the eleven MDOC employees who completed questionnaires, eight of them found a lack of education to be a primary cause of incarceration and recidivism. One common response among MDOC representatives indicated that of the population with which they work— primarily African Americans males between the ages of 18 and 35—most do not have a completed high school education. One respondent clarified that whether this group of males were not provided the opportunity because of economic disadvantage, or they simply chose not to pursue an education, the majority of them are lacking a high school diploma or even a General Education Development certificate (GED). An academic teacher detailed that not only are individuals lacking general education, but they are also lacking basic understandings about things such as “identity, self-awareness, and integrity.” A field officer suggested that, upon release, offenders should be educated on “technology and societal changes” to better equip them with necessary skills for survival and success at reentry. With employment already limited in Mississippi, and opportunities even more scarce for labeled criminals, having at least a high school education is extremely important in increasing the likelihood of actually obtaining a legal job. Reisig, Bales, Hay, & Wang (2007) support this idea finding that “recidivism is more likely among those who did not complete high school, are unable to find stable employment, and who lack strong family commitments” (p. 409).

Employment

Of the eleven MDOC questionnaire respondents, each of them found problems with employment to be crucial factors to crime, incarceration, and recidivism among the inmates with which they most frequently work. One field officer actually specified that the current economic state of the country as well as Mississippi is the primary reason Black males are imprisoned and recidivate. Another field officer indicated that, in destitute locations of Mississippi like the Delta, there is a deficiency in jobs altogether; therefore, not only is it difficult for ex-offenders returning to the community to find employment, but the inability of non-criminal citizens to find employment adversely affects socioeconomic status and social mobility and increases the potential of criminal behavior to commence. She adds that there are virtually none but minimum wage positions available for the uneducated (those without high school diplomas), which is a significant portion of the African American male community in Mississippi. In addition to a high number of uneducated Black males in Mississippi, field officers and pre-release program coordinators, alike, agree that much of the Black male population lack employable skills, particularly, expertise in common trades available in certain locations. Even further, where job opportunities arise may create a problem for job seekers. For individuals already suffering financially, transportation for traveling to a job may not be obtainable (Visser & Travis, 2003). Inmates returning to communities are often released without identification and are thus not permitted to drive at all, making it both hard to find a job and to find reliable transportation to get to a job on a daily basis if hired.

Family & Community

Employees from the Mississippi Department of Corrections confirm the importance of family ties in their responses to the questionnaire. Seven of the eleven respondents found strong

family foundations and/or community support to be vital to an inmate's success. While some of the MDOC representatives specifically indicate that family/community ties and supportive backing are important during imprisonment and critical post-release, others highlighted how important having a closely knit family who offers encouragement and support is prior to incarceration. Their assertions are heavily supported by a myriad of studies including the widely acclaimed social bond/social control theory introduced by Travis Hirschi in 1969 (refer to Chapters 3 & 6). Solid connections to one's family, community and other institutions act as informal mechanisms of social control. These bonds influence the manners in which we choose to behave; the closer the bonds, the less inclined we are to misbehave and risk the chance of injuring our connections (Hirschi, 1969).

Stigma

Research also revealed that stigma plays a major role in recidivism. Nine out of the eleven respondents from MDOC identified stigma as a key problem with re-entering society. As previously discussed, employers most often reject, or are especially reluctant to hire, ex-offenders due to their criminal histories. Mississippi Department of Corrections respondents emphasize the point that the number of companies who will hire ex-offenders is extremely limited. Responding to the question "What have you found to be the primary causes of recidivism?," one pre-release coordinator affirmed that "the world is less compromising for offenders..." referring to the difficulty offenders face in mainstream society as a result of damaging labels. One field officer testified that "offenders who are treated like 'people' [and not criminals] are the ones who try harder to succeed." Smith and Bohm's (2008) concept of alienation validates the field officer's testimony suggesting that "crime can be reduced via critical criminology based policies that include: restoration, integration, social support, and

community building—policies that have the potential of decreasing the influence of an alienating social structure” (p. 12). Similarly, Goffman (1963) asserts that “lacking the salutary feed-back of daily social intercourse with others, the self-isolate can become suspicious, depressed, hostile, anxious, and bewildered” (p. 13). Altogether, these arguments support the idea that rejection, exclusion, and alienation as a consequence of one’s criminal history has great potential of influencing an individual to return to crime and re-associate himself with a group or lifestyle to which he feels welcomed (See Goffman’s discussion of the “in-group”).

Ecological/Environmental Influence

Seven of the eleven MDOC respondents found structural and neighborhood-specific influences particularly significant to an offender’s reentry process. For African American males returning to poorly structured environments (i.e. neighborhoods with concentrated poverty, residential instability, etc.) after incarceration, their chances at recidivism are extremely high (Mead, 2012; Western & Pettit, 2010). One field officer explains that one of the main causes of recidivism amongst the population of male offenders with which she works is “going back to the place where the trouble began,” insinuating that returning to a place of disadvantage is likely to instigate the resumption of past behaviors and render similar or even worse consequences. Another field officer has similar sentiments simply stating that trouble arises when offenders return to the “same people, place and things.” These responses indicate that released offenders face the same distractions (e.g. irresponsible friends) and difficulties (e.g. poor job market) they faced prior to incarceration; however, now they also carry with them a criminal history and the stigma attached. In addition, attaining an education and acquiring gainful employment—previously a struggle—is made even more challenging. Visher and Travis (2003) maintain that “social context may be especially important for former inmates, because their stay in prison

attenuates their ties to the economic and social institutions important to their successful reentry” (as cited by Reisig et al., 2007, p. 410). Reisig et al. (2007) concur suggesting, “future recidivism research should account for the social context to which Black ex-inmates are released. Prisoners are not released into a social vacuum, but instead reenter communities with differing levels of economic inequities that potentially constrain their ability to pursue conventional lifestyles” (p. 427). Furthermore, Reisig et al. (2007) sternly insist, “The ability of released prisoners to desist from crime is affected not simply by their own attributes, but by the characteristics of the broader social context they reenter” (p. 427).

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research infer that many opinions toward Black males produced and reinforced to permit the viability of the institution of slavery, Black Codes, convict-leasing, and Jim Crow are the same, or, at least, similar to those employed to prompt the emergence and support of the contemporary mass incarceration of Black males. One must have knowledge of the South's history of race relations to understand the lopsidedness in the number of Black males incarcerated in Mississippi. One must also be educated on the effects of stratification and the inequality produced by social structures to understand the phenomenon of the disproportionate mass incarceration of Black males. A comprehension of the social effects of racism and discrimination, the consequences of racial and regional stigma and alienation, and the transmission of racial attitudes and stereotypes through cultural conventions, are all necessary in identifying how mass incarceration influences habits of judgment and continues to affect the social and economic mobility of African American males and their families. Truly understanding combined corollaries of social inequalities and how these inequities and consequential misinterpretations of one another hinder our progression as a nation is the only way society will realize there is good reason to fight for much needed change.

The next section will elaborate on the research findings obtained from the administration of questionnaires completed by employees at the Mississippi Department of Corrections using other scholarly works to support those findings. In addition, I will explore how contemporary representations of African Americans in popular culture function—as they did historically—to

vilify Black males unfairly cementing the perception of Black males as criminals. Finally, I will conclude my discussion with recommendations for future research on incarceration and reentry.

Education

Mississippi Department of Corrections respondents found education crucial to inmates' decisions to commit crime. Further research confirmed a lack of education to be the most common factor in the occurrence of crime and incarceration amongst disadvantaged African Americans (Alexander, 2012; Garrison, 2011; O'Connor, 2001; Powell, 2008; Reisig et al., 2007; Western & Pettit, 2010). Alexander (2012) reports that "about 70 percent of offenders and ex-offenders are high school dropouts" (p. 150). Powell (2008) asserts:

"Theoretically, education serves as an equalizer in our society; it is one element of the social capital needed to participate fully in a democracy, and hypothetically, it should provide all students with an equal opportunity to succeed. However, for children of color who live in poverty, inadequate education works as an oppressing force, trapping them in communities removed from opportunity and limiting their political participation. These inequities reinforce segregation and perpetuate the ongoing cycle of poverty and violence." (p. 322)

Reporting that "The rise in African American incarceration rates has been concentrated almost entirely among lower-class, uneducated Blacks," Forman (2011) confirms and identifies the oppressive consequences of inadequate education (p. 794). These affirmations amplify in the case of impoverished Blacks in Mississippi. Mississippi—with a Black population of about 37 percent—is both the poorest state in the country and lowest ranked in educational attainment (Burd-Sharps et al., 2009). While African Americans only constitute a little over a third of Mississippi's total population, they make up approximately 64 percent of its current prison populace, not including those confined in jails or under correctional supervision (e.g. probation, halfway houses, etc.) (U.S. Census Report, 2011; also see Appendix B). The state's poverty level is at nearly 22 percent with 32 percent of African American males living below the poverty line

(Hill, 2008; U.S. Census Report, 2011). Correspondingly, according to a study conducted by Burd-Sharps et al. (2009), 32.5 percent of Black males in Mississippi have less than a high school diploma (White male Mississippians, 18.3), and only 8.5 percent have a bachelor's degree (White male Mississippians, 22.9). Together, these figures substantiate Western and Pettit's (2010) indication that "...serving time in prison has become a normal life event" for African American males with no more than a high school education (p. 8). Forman's (2011) claim that "...prison has become the province of the poor and uneducated..." not only appears to also support Western and Pettit's (2010) contention, but seems to hold true and steady (p. 794).

A primary issue with inaccessibility to quality education is that without proper teaching and acquisition of knowledge, the level of power African American males' may potentially possess is compromised (Storey, 2006). Storey (2006) argues that "knowledge is always a weapon of power," therefore, when one lacks knowledge (e.g. poor Black males in Mississippi), he is less empowered than he who is more knowledgeable (e.g. political leaders and policy makers, etc.) (p. 102). Pierre Bourdieu (1984) recognizes one's level of power as "symbolic capital." Thus, Black males who are relatively deprived of the access to a decent education are rendered powerless as their symbolic capital is inadequate, if at all. Feelings of powerlessness, as a result of being locked out of legitimate opportunity structures, are primary sources of strain that subsequently inspire individuals to engage in deviant or criminal behavior (Kaufman, et al., 2008; Merton, 1938; Smith & Bohm, 2008). The effects of education deficiency and diminished human and social capital, then, function as not only an individual problem, but a grave social issue.

While there are substantial educational opportunities in the state of Mississippi, the lack of accessibility to quality education for many African Americans from underprivileged backgrounds and those living in impoverished areas may inspire young Black males to

compensate for their educational deficiencies in deviant ways (Anderson, 2008; O'Connor, 2001). Underprivileged Black males—whether lacking the resources or, simply, not exercising the agency to access resources to education—frequently “...compensate for their low social status by overinflating the importance of concepts like respect and honor,” (O'Connor, 2001, p. 77; also see Elijah Anderson, 2008). Earning respect is often achieved by being the most profitable drug dealer or committing acts of violence (Anderson, 2008). These deviant methods of gaining respect have great potential of leading to arrest and incarceration. Serving time in jail or prison further distances the individual from educational opportunities.

My research also revealed the difficulty of trying to obtain an education while imprisoned and upon release. The Mississippi Department of Corrections website supplies site visitors with a list of programs, courses and training offered to inmates; however, while many programs and classes are available, they are only accessible to particular inmates of specific classifications. This eliminates thousands of men from being able to enhance their education while serving out their sentence and improve their chances at successful reentry. O'Connor (2001) found that “inmates desire education and training” (p. 72), however, their classification does not always allow them to participate in prison-offered programs, and, in some cases, prevents them from attaining an education subsequent to their release, further complicating the reentry process. O'Connor (2001) also informs, “The Crime Bill of 1994 eliminated use of Pell Grants to fund higher education of prisoners, removing from most facilities all college-credit bearing programs, courses that offer skills deemed to be a major reason why some inmates do not return to prison” (p. 84). Moreover, the Aid Elimination Penalty implemented during the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1998, automatically disqualifies applicants who have any previous drug convictions (except juvenile convictions) from receiving federal financial aid

regardless of when the conviction occurred (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). In the state of Mississippi, nearly 30 percent of its Black male prison (not including jail) inmates are incarcerated for drug related charges (see Appendix G). Therefore, this population of offenders—who, perhaps, have the opportunity to obtain their GED while incarcerated—are ineligible for federal aid to assist in pursuing a college education and improving their chances of gaining employment and not returning to jail or prison upon release.

When an already disadvantaged Black male commits a crime and is sent to jail or prison as punishment, access to education, again, is limited, further disadvantaging him and his family, as well as the community upon his release (Alexander, 2012; Western & Pettit, 2010). Although prisons often offer educational courses, and even have libraries for inmates to access, the quality of education one receives is imperative to the likelihood of his eventual progress. What is more harmful is that once an inmate is released back into society, the limited access he once had to education is diminished even further. If convicted of drug charges, or a felony, released incarcerated peoples are restricted from receiving federal aid to use toward education costs (i.e. tuition, books, etc.). Although there are resources to assist those who have intentions of becoming productive members of society and wanting to begin by pursuing an education, those resources are scarce and the process can be extremely challenging. Many ex-offenders are discouraged by the obstacles they face and find it easier to give up and return to crime, once again, causing strain on their families and further disrupting the community. Societal rejection and weak will combined, may, then, result in continued disconnectedness from the very institutions that prevent and/or deter crime and those essential for achieving success (i.e. education, employment, etc.) supporting Hirschi's (1969) social bond theory.

Employment

Each MDOC representative expressed the inability for inmates to find secure employment prior and subsequent to release as one of the most critical problems. Additional research substantiated their claims conveying that employment opportunities play a significant role in an individual's decision to engage in criminal activity (Kaufman et al., 2008; Mead, 2012). Kaufman et al. (2008) argue that African Americans are “more likely than Whites to be poor, unemployed and employed in jobs in the secondary labour market” resulting in economic strain and increasing the likelihood of committing crime (p. 425). In the state of Mississippi, the poorest state in the U.S., fruitful employment opportunities are scarce. Some men are simply unwilling or reluctant to subject themselves to what they may consider “slave jobs” (Wacquant, 2000) being that many of the available positions and jobs ordinarily obtained by Black residents are in factory type settings requiring taxing labor for modest pay (Hill, 2008). Furthermore, there is not an abundance of valuable job opportunities located in rural and destitute areas—like much of Mississippi—and therefore even fewer positions available for residents in those areas. Of course, there are locations in the state that have greater occupational opportunities; however, the locations in which these opportunities are available may not be easily accessible to African Americans who live a considerable distance away and/or have unreliable transportation to travel to and from a job. Transportation issues may become even more difficult for individuals attempting to reintegrate after incarceration because of a deficiency in funds needed for a vehicle or, perhaps, because they do not possess a valid driver's license upon release (Visher & Travis, 2003).

Inability to obtain gainful employment in Mississippi has been a grave issue amongst Black males that has contributed to high rates of crime, incarceration, and recidivism. As previously

stated, 32 percent of Black males in Mississippi are living below the poverty line compared to 11 percent of White males (Hill, 2008, p. 2). This significant discrepancy lies partially in the problem with unemployment, and partially with inadequate wages. Hill (2008) reports, “the median household income of African-Americans in the state in 2006 was \$21, 969 or just 51% that of White households (\$43,139)” (p. i), and 56 percent of the state’s median household income (U.S. Census Report, 2011). Much of the incongruity is attributed to the concentration of Black males and females in certain occupational categories in Mississippi (Hill, 2008). Powell (2008) explains that “exploited populations maintain a role in society—to occupy the lowest social ranks and work in undesirable, unskilled, low-wage positions” (Powell, 2008, p. 317).

The concentration of Black males and females in specific job categories—which is “greater in Mississippi than in the South, and greater in the South than in the U.S. as a whole”—permits significant wage disparities to withstand (Hill, 2008, p. 7). Black males are often found in unskilled service positions, such as warehousing, janitorial, and maintenance (Alexander, 2012; Hill, 2008). African Americans’ unwillingness to expand their occupational horizons may well impede their ability to make a better living and advance socially and economically. Hill (2008) argues “...Black men and women in Mississippi are concentrated in certain occupational categories, and changing social expectations of both blacks and Whites about what jobs and social roles are appropriate for African Americans is basic to the social changes that will close the income gap” (p. 6).

The lack of education amongst the Black population contributes to the inability to seize a greater variety of occupational opportunities (Burd-Sharps et al., 2009). Burd-Sharps et al. (2009) indicate that “the economic returns to a college education are large and growing, and a bachelor’s degree is increasingly necessary for jobs that provide benefits...[of] a middle-class

lifestyle” (p. 21). Only 67.5 percent of Black males in Mississippi have a high school diploma (or an equivalent, i.e., General Education Development) compared to 81.7 percent of White males; 8.5 percent of Black males obtain a bachelor’s degree compared to 22.9 percent of White males; and a mere 2.9 percent have a graduate degree compared to 8.1 percent of White males (Burd-Sharps et al., 2009, p. 22). Not only does the absence of credentials render Black males unqualified for particular positions, but it may also cause employers to believe applicants are incapable of learning and performing work to the company’s standard. It is possible that uneducated Black males are already aware of the rejection they may face, and, as a result, decide to apply to positions they are more probable to acquire.

Moreover, both the testimonies from MDOC employees and literature on reentry revealed the detriment of the incarceration experience on potential employment upon release. Western and Pettit (2010) validate MDOC respondents’ claims that employers are unwilling to give ex-offenders the opportunity to work finding that, “employers, fearing legal liability or even...unreliability, are extremely reluctant to hire workers with criminal convictions” (p. 14). Reisig et al. (2007) emphasize that in addition to rejection from employers, “gaining legitimate employment is difficult [for offenders] because their stay in prison has likely weakened their connections to labor market opportunities, depleted their work skills, and invited greater scrutiny and suspicion from potential employers” (p. 412). Offering a solution-based opinion, Marbley and Ferguson (2005) contend “...there is an urgent need to have a systematic way of partnering with businesses, colleges and universities, faith-based institutions, and communities in an effort to reinstate reformed prisoners back into society as contributing, taxpaying citizens” (p. 637).

Furthermore, the inability to gain sufficient employment after incarceration has been positively linked to a return to crime (Reisig et al., 2007; Visher & Travis, 2003; Western &

Pettit, 2010). Alexander (2012) declares that “finding a job allows a person to establish a positive role in the community, develop a healthy self-image, and keep a distance from negative influence and opportunities for illegal behavior” (pp. 148-149). Several of the MDOC respondents indicated that not being able to find a job, or simply obtaining employment that pays scanty wages, inspires ex-offenders to resume criminal lifestyles. Wacquant (2000) argues that some Black men often “refuse to submit to the indignity of substandard work in the peripheral sectors of the service economy—what ghetto residents commonly label ‘slave jobs,’” and instead, turn to underground (illegitimate) markets for income (p. 385). Reisig et al. (2007) find that “social constraints, such as high levels of poverty or inequality, may greatly encourage crime. But other conditions, such as a strong job market or the availability of needed services, may offer a more genuine opportunity to desist from crime” (p. 410). If offenders hail from disadvantaged neighborhoods, and return to them upon release, their chances at gaining employment in the same environment they were unable to find satisfactory positions in initially, is not likely to improve, but instead, is impaired even further. Again, the strain caused from unemployment or underemployment may easily motivate Black males to resort to nonconventional means of making a living supporting Merton’s (1938) strain theory, Shaw and McKay’s (1942, 1969) social disorganization/social ecology theory, and Hirschi’s (1969) social bond theory.

Socioeconomic Disadvantage

As previously discussed, poverty is a problem in Mississippi in general; however, especially for the states’ Black residents. Mississippi Department of Corrections respondents indicated that the largest groups of inmates they worked with were African American males from low socioeconomic backgrounds. These implications support the theories of Shaw and McKay (1942, 1969), that suggests delinquency is highest in areas that are concentrated with nonwhites and low

median incomes, etc., and Merton (1938), that suggests limited access to legitimate means to attain conventional goals will inspire crime. The scarcity of active attention paid in scholarship to the Mississippi's impoverished conditions and the role of these conditions in the disproportionate incarceration of Black males seems to imply that there is very little zeal for finding methods to improve the quality of life for the large portion of Mississippians suffering the consequences of Old Southern customs and ideologies that founded racial stratification. Without continued discussion, the crisis of nearly a third of Mississippi's African American population (not including its Black inmates) remains virtually invisible (Bassett, 2006; Richardson, 2007).

It is conceivably possible that the alarming socioeconomic circumstances of an unfortunate number of African Americans plays a significant role in the habits of judgment toward the group as a whole. The African American population, particularly, is habitually viewed as lazy and unwilling to work hard to elevate themselves from impoverished conditions (Alexander, 2012; Blackmon, 2008). Similar sentiments were held historically as "most White people believed African Americans lacked the proper motivation to work..." (Alexander, 2012, p. 28). With 38 percent of Black females and 32 percent of Black males currently living below the poverty line in Mississippi (these figures not including incarcerated peoples), this estimation may appear valid. However, nationally, Blacks and Whites receive government assistance (e.g. food stamps, housing services, etc.) at very similar rates, yet, African Americans are most often associated with indolence and taking unfair advantage of taxpayers' money (Alexander, 2012). Such judgments may negatively influence policy makers to implement policies that are insensitive to disadvantaged people of color and have disproportionately adverse effects on poor Black communities (Percival, 2009).

Moreover, there is little discussion about how disproportionately incarcerating Black men and uprooting them from their homes contributes to Black women's needs for government assistance to maintain their households (Alexander, 2012, pp. 49, 52). The financial difficulty that ensues as a result of household disruption does not generally improve; too often, the offspring of an imprisoned male and mother on welfare unfortunately endure the experience of living an impoverished life (Mendez, 2002, p. 153; Raphael, 2011). Generational poverty within African American communities in Mississippi, as a result of historical methods of social control used to exploit, oppress, and dominate the lives of Black people, has and continues to hinder the social mobility of countless Black communities resulting in the preservation of a racial caste system. The effects of mass incarceration function in a parallel manner.

Hailing from generations of poverty and remaining in unchanging circumstances—especially in such a destitute state like Mississippi—can easily be the beginning of a vicious cycle of poverty and disadvantage (Tickamyer & Duncan, 1995). If one is born into an underprivileged family, his/her chances of achieving the “American Dream” (obtaining a good job, buying a home, owning a decent car, etc.) are almost immediately compromised. As a Black male resident of Mississippi, trying to progress and succeed socioeconomically in an already deprived location is complicated enough. Starting out with limited access to already scarce resources can make it extremely difficult, and even discouraging for poor Black males in Mississippi to advance socially and economically. Fagan et al. (1993) reasoned that communities with concentrated poverty are affected by a “break in the intergenerational linkages that in the past helped each generation find their way to stable employment and immersion in conventional life roles” (as cited by Powell, 2008, p. 315). Powell (2008) argued, “This loss of social capital produces diminished economic expectations and weak social models for poor and working-class youth,

leaving them feeling hopeless and powerless” (p. 315). We can deduce from both arguments that without a solid foundation, it may be easier for some to individuals to pursue non-conventional life courses.

Family & Community

Several MDOC respondents indicated the importance of family and community in crime deterrence pre-incarceration, during imprisonment, and post-release. Correspondingly, other research suggests close familial relationships continue to be positively correlated to crime deterrence before and after incarceration (Hirschi, 1969; Marbley & Ferguson, 2005; Visher & Travis, 2003). Incarceration places strain on the inmate’s family left on the outside. Black men that are taken out of the home and sent to prison often leave a wife/girlfriend with the responsibility of caring for children and maintaining the household financially (Raphael, 2011). Frequently, a parent or grandparent of the inmate assumes the responsibility for the children left behind (Raphael, 2011). This causes additional financial strain and further damages the economic stability of Black families living under disadvantaged circumstances (Mendez, 2002, p. 153). Family and friends who intend to maintain their relationships and offer support by visiting inmates also face additional pressure of making time and having the means necessary for traveling to (usually) long distances to remote detention centers. Nevertheless, those who are able to maintain solid relationships with their families and friends cope with imprisonment better and have higher chances of “postrelease success” (Visher & Travis, 2003, p. 99).

Application of Theories

Social Bond Theory

For underprivileged Black males in the South, and Mississippi in particular,—where quality education and fruitful employment are scarce,—social bonds to certain institutions are

compromised from the start. The instability or lack of social bonds may easily inspire disadvantaged Black males to take part in underground markets that have been lucrative to African Americans for nearly a century (e.g. numbers, moonshining, drugs, etc.; see Schatzberg & Kelly, 1996). Incarceration fosters the disconnection to institutions of power that are instrumental in crime prevention and deterrence, potentially motivating the continuance of criminal behavior upon release. A common consequence of repeating deviant behaviors is recidivism and thus a preservation of negative judgment toward Black males as incorrigible criminals who need to be controlled.

The incarceration experience deteriorates already faint social bonds by separating an offender from institutions critical to any ordinary (i.e. not stigmatized) individual's potential success (Visher & Travis, 2003). Close ties to one's family, friends, and community have been positively correlated to crime deterrence (Hirschi, 1969). Separating a man from his family can not only be detrimental to a mother, wife (or significant other), and children left behind emotionally, mentally, and financially, but it is also an assault on his masculinity compelling him to compensate in alternative ways (Sabo et al., 2001). A Mississippi Department of Corrections field officer offers an example of this claim stating that many of the offenders she has worked with were the sole providers of their households prior to incarceration and had an extremely difficult time finding work that rendered sufficient means to care for their families. Because of their struggle to find adequate employment and the ensuing assault on their manhood, a great deal of offenders turned or returned to illegal methods of money making to maintain some type of financial stability.

Furthermore, it appears that Black males returning to communities after incarceration are more disconnected from prosocial values and institutions because of the additional rejection they

encounter as a result of their criminal background (Hirschi, 1969; Western & Pettit, 2010). Being turned away from jobs and federal assistance for things such as education and housing may easily discourage ex-offenders and motivate them to seek unlawful approaches to acquire basic needs. Visher and Travis (2003) find common challenges to be "...finding a place to live; securing formal identification; reestablishing ties with family; returning to high-risk places and situations; and the daunting challenge to of finding a job, often with poor work history and now, a criminal record" (p. 96). One pre-release counselor suggested that employers "should be more willing to give offenders a chance instead of being so quick to judge." Another MDOC representative maintains—similar to Alexander (2012)—that "having a job helps with confidence and feeling independent," and therefore, deters an individual from engaging in or returning to criminal behavior. However, the judgment and obstacles Black males face upon reentering already disadvantaged communities exacerbates their disconnections to valuable institutions. Reisig et al. (2007) argue that "...for Black felons released to areas with high racial inequality, the ideal that 'all men are created equal' will stand in sharp contrast to the reality of feeling isolated from the economic opportunities that promote a law-abiding reentry into society" (p. 428).

Labeling Theory: Stigma

Research suggests that stigma associated with being Black and male—stemming from historical racism and discrimination—lead to the criminalization of Black males (Alexander, 2012). Erving Goffman (1963) argued that "[s]ociologically, the central issues concerning [African Americans] is their place in the social structure; the contingencies these persons encounter in face-to-face interaction is only one part of the problem, and something that cannot itself be understood without reference to the history, the political development, and the current

policies of the group” (p. 127). Adding region, socioeconomic status, and criminal record to the core problem (race) merely amplifies the level of stigma an individual or a group experiences (Pfohl, 1994). Powell (2008) argues that “when a group occupies a stigmatized social space prescribed by the dominate group, it is not surprising that its behavior is seen as threatening” (p. 313). Goffman’s (1963) assertion confirms Powell’s (2008) argument with his stigma-theory, “an ideology to explain his [e.g. poor Southern Black male] inferiority and account for the danger he represents, sometimes rationalizing an animosity based on other differences, such as those of social class” (p. 5). Furthermore, Powell’s (2008) statement may function to partially explain why over time Black males in the South have consistently been portrayed as violent and criminal (see Richardson, 2007, p. 4).

The excessive criminalization of Black males and their disproportionate incarceration construct an additional stigma for Black males in Mississippi. Goffman (1963), providing an example of the process of stigmatization, explains that a criminal is “...reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (p. 3). As a poor Black male from Mississippi, one has already been reduced by way of his race, socioeconomic status, and regional origin; adding a criminal background merely adds insult to injury. Western and Pettit (2010)—like Richardson (2007)—argue that “because [offenders] are so deeply concentrated in a small disadvantaged fraction of the population, the social and economic effects of incarceration create a discrete social group whose collective experience is so distinctive yet unknown that their disadvantage remains largely beyond the apprehension of public policy or public conversation” (p. 16).

Furthermore, the group’s “social marginality is deepened by the inequalities produced by incarceration,” enabling the cycle of disadvantage and crime to persist (p. 16). Western and Pettit

(2010) conclude “America’s prisons and jails have produced a new social group, a group of social outcasts who are joined by the shared experience of incarceration, crime, poverty, racial minority, and low education. As an outcast group, the men and women in our penal institutions have little access to the social mobility available to the mainstream. Social and economic disadvantage, crystallizing in penal confinement is sustained over the life course and transmitted from one generation to the next” (p. 8). Their assertion facilitates a clearer explanation of the social effects of stigma individually and generationally.

Ecological/Environmental Influence

Visher and Travis (2003) state that “the study of crime and delinquency has a rich history of ecological research that has focused on the ways in which characteristics of communities may influence rates of crime and violence” (p. 102). Neighborhoods like those found in the Mississippi Delta, Lowndes-Monroe County, Pike-Adams, and Lauderdale-Newton counties—that are deficient in job opportunities, heavily populated with uneducated Blacks, and were clearly affected by the South’s troubled past—are rich with crime predicting features (see Mississippi Human Development Report, 2009 for county groupings). Visher and Travis (2003) go further to suggest that “...structural features of neighborhoods, such as residential stability, rates of organizational participation, and measures of informal and formal social control, have either direct or mediated effects on individual criminal activity” (p. 102). *Representations in*

Popular Culture

African American males are criminalized and vilified in popular culture more than any other group of people (Campbell et al., 2012). Campbell et al. (2012) in their text, *Race and News*, argue that media “...influence[s] the way members of society see the world...” and serves an important “...function of defining race...” (p. 65). There is an ongoing “stereotypical

perception of Black males as inherently violent and predatory” that is reinforced by the disproportionate attention they receive in the news, in literature, on television, etc. (Powell, 2008, p. 312). As Glassner (2000) highlights, “the media disproportionately shows Black men as criminals and this artificially distorts public perception” (p. 7). In doing so “the media continues to build and perpetuate [stereotypical] myths...” that stem from age-old racist ideologies that were profoundly accepted and practiced in the South (Smith & Hattery, 2006, p. 6).

Research suggests that the excessive criminalization and vilification of Black males in the media influences societal opinions, creates and fortifies White fear, and molds and maintains social structures that disproportionately and adversely affect Black men (Mendez, 2002; Percival, 2009). Boyd (2008) argues that the media “contributes to a White imagination that locates crime in the bodies of young Black males, simultaneously exonerating Whiteness of all societal transgressions” (p. 82). Campbell et al. (2012) express similar sentiments inferring, “mass media...are among the apparatuses that generate and circulate ideologies and thus reproduce stereotypes and myths that serve to reinforce White supremacy” (p. 64). Reproducing stereotypes, again, creates White fear, therefore calling for the formation and implementation of public policies that disproportionately affect poor Black males in an attempt to reassure fearful persons that they will be protected against (Black) criminals (Percival, 2009).

The manner in which African American males are represented on television, in music, and literature, reinforce long-standing stereotypes and justify negative judgments of Black males, especially in the South (Campbell et al., 2012; Campbell, 1995; Richardson, 2007). Dowler et al. (2006) highlight “a staple assertion...that societal perceptions of crime are formed through exposure to various forms of media, including television, film, video, and internet service” (p. 837). The excessive placement of the Black male face on crime, then, unfairly and deceitfully

influences society's development and/or maintenance of pre-conceived ideas that suggest blackness is synonymous with criminality. We may refer as far back as *The Clansman* (1905), by Thomas Dixon, which was later adapted into a silent film, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), one of the first, and most prominent novels to vilify and criminalize the Black male to confirm this claim. Early theatrical productions featured characters like Sambo and Jim Crow—two fictional eccentrics that functioned to degrade Black men and confirm ideals of White male supremacy (Boskin, 1986).

Moreover, judgments about Black males are reinforced through “racial media imagery,” (Alexander, 2012, p. 182). Dowler et al. (2006) argues “racial images saturate media portrayals of criminality and victimization,” disproportionately placing the Blackface on that of the criminal (p. 840). There are several popular television shows that feature prison life and the “type” of people (mostly, or at least, seemingly, uneducated Black males) who need correction. For example, *Lockup*, *Lockdown*, *Jail*, and *First Week In*, all chronicle the lives of inmates and the operation of the correctional facilities. Again, Black males are overly represented on camera as uneducated, unruly, deviant, savages that must be locked in cages to keep America safe (Davis, 2003, p. 14). Furthermore, reality shows like *The First 48*—a series that follows homicide detectives as they investigate murders—feature mostly Black males as the slayers promoting fear and perpetuating stereotypes of dangerous Black men across America. What is known, but not necessarily thought about, is that most violence committed by Black males is inflicted upon other blacks. However, the images media portray are usually Black criminals and White victims, fortifying “the perception that violent crime is committed by African American males rather than White males, which leads to more serious criminal penalties...” (Garrison, 2011, p. 101). Furthermore, “media focus on crimes with African American perpetrators further

supporting the perception that crime is a ‘Black problem’ to be solved by the courts and prisons...” (Garrison, 2011, p. 101).

Gaston (1986) argues “the media serve as the vehicle that carries the fantasies consumed by young Black males” (p. 376). Around the same time that the war on drugs commenced in the late 1970s- early 1980s, an emerging genre of music began making its way to and through Black communities. Gangster rap, as it was coined, signified much of what White America had been frightened of in regards to Black males. Within their lyrics, Black gangster rap artists bragged about selling drugs, committing murders, engaging in hypersexual activities, and expressing blatant disrespect for the government and authority figures. They flamboyantly portrayed themselves as gun toting, gold chain wearing, money flashing, fancy car-driving males that made it out of “the hood.” Young Black males from disadvantaged communities, in addition to an unexpectedly high number of middle and upper class White children began idolizing these musicians. Lower-class Black adolescents tried to emulate the rappers by behaving in ways discussed in gangster rap music lyrics, contributing to the upsurge of crime and mass incarceration in Black communities.

While gangster rap was constructing the frame for an “authentic Black experience,” several movies also emerged correspondingly glorifying the gangster image. Munby (2011) notes, “these films were necessarily criminal, ghetto-centric, or gangsta because they attempted to represent the real lived experiences of the postindustrial Black inner city” (p. 170). Movies like *Boys in the Hood* (1991), *New Jack City* (1991), *South Central* (1992), *Menace to Society* (1993), and *Fresh* (1994), all chronicled the lives of young Black males living in impoverished urban neighborhoods who sold drugs and committed extreme acts of violence to gain respect and earn a living. Munby (2011) notes, “like many gangster films, homosocial bonding is revealed to

be critical to survival and success among those stuck on the wrong side of the economic and ethnic tracks” (p. 169). Although many of the characters died, were physically harmed, or served time in prison as a result of their criminal behavior, they were idolized for the respect they gained, the women they attracted, and the money they made that enabled them to drive fancy cars, and buy designer clothing and jewelry. Harris (2006) asserts “these films are social commentaries, indictments of racism and depictions of ‘everyday’ African American lives” (p. 83).

Black male youth throughout the United States revered the fictional characters featured in the aforementioned films and attempted to mimic their behaviors in hopes of achieving comparable respect and material wealth (Munby, 2011). Grier and Cobbs (1976) explain, “As boys approach manhood, masculinity becomes more and more bound up with money making. In a capitalistic society economic wealth is inextricably interwoven with manhood. Closely allied is power—power to control and direct other men, power to influence the course of one’s own and other lives” (as cited by Gaston, 1986, p. 375). This argument, then, may help us understand young African American males’ fascination and idolization of the characters in these films. Consequently, popular culture’s depiction of “Black life” perpetuates negative stereotypes of Black males arousing public fear, triggering the implementation of policies set out to ensure public safety while adversely affecting disproportionate numbers of poor, uneducated people of color.

Unfortunately, though, information transmitted through media to American consumers that do not necessarily have regular day-to-day experiences with African Americans is the information people accept as factual representation of African Americans. Entman & Rojecki (2000) assert, “Lacking much opportunity for repeated close contact with a wide variety of

Blacks, Whites depend heavily on cultural material, especially media images, for cataloging Blacks. The mediated communications help explain the tenacious survival of racial stereotypes despite a social norm that dampens public admission of prejudice” (p. 49). Likewise, Kellstedt (2003) argues, “If a typical media consumer holds unflattering beliefs about what Black people are like, then he or she is not likely to encounter much information that disconfirms those beliefs; on the contrary, he or she will likely find a picture of blacks as a ‘problem’ people –with an accompanying implication that they are at the very core of postwar America’s defining social problems, such as the erosion of the traditional family, rising violent crime, urban decay, and the increase in illegal drug use” (p. 18). Futhermore, Kellstedt (2003) explained, “When Americans consume news from the mass media, what are they learning about blacks—what they are like, what kind of people they are? From this perspective, one justification for this research is that many Americans, Whites especially, learn a great deal about what they think blacks are like indirectly rather than directly, through the mass media rather than through (or at least in addition to) personal experience” (p. 26). The power media holds should be used, instead, to change existing ideologies and stereotypical beliefs about African Americans. If used in a more positive manner, perhaps, the negative racial attitudes that persist could be transformed and the degradation African Americans feel and express through deviant or criminal behaviors could potentially change creating a very different social environment.

Disproportionate Effects of Policies

Distasteful images of Black males in literature, music, and on television are often confirmed as true when African Americans behave badly increasingly influencing Whites’ racial attitudes toward African Americans that, as a result, have a serious impact on rules and regulations for American citizens. In fact, Alexander (2012) argues that “race has always

influenced the administration of justice in the United States” (p. 187). Entman and Rojecki (2000) present a similar argument stating that “animosity and racism are reflected in political decisionmaking” (p. 22). With Whites typically and predominantly occupying positions of power, they are instrumental in implementing public policies based on their developed perceptions from official statistics and media apparatuses. Percival (2009) argues that negative attitudes toward African Americans tend to “conflate with crime policy attitudes, and Whites with more negative evaluations/stereotypes of African Americans are more likely to support punitive crime policies and less likely to support prevention-based approaches (Percival, 2009, p. 179).

Disadvantaged African American males in the South, specifically, have been and continue to be harshly affected by public policies (Wood, 2007). Wood (2007) reports that “from 1980 to 2001, the [Southern] region accounted for 45% of all those added to prison populations, and in 2001, nearly 10% if all the prisoners in the world were to be found in the South” (p. 230). With Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas being the leading states in incarceration rates, these figures help place the mass incarceration of African American males in the South after the commencement of the War on Drugs into perspective. Alexander (2012) notes “The War on Drugs cloaked in race-neutral language, offered Whites opposed to racial reform a unique opportunity to express their hostility toward Blacks and Black progress, without being exposed to the charge of racism” (p. 54). Alexander (2012) also highlights that “Rural Whites are often the most punitive...” (p. 54), which offers an alternative understanding to the intensity of Mississippians’ practice of Southern justice and how it affects poor African American males who become caught in the web of the criminal justice system.

The launching of the War on Drugs in the 1970s and the introduction and implementation of policies that would knowingly, inequitably, and negatively affect Black males from poor

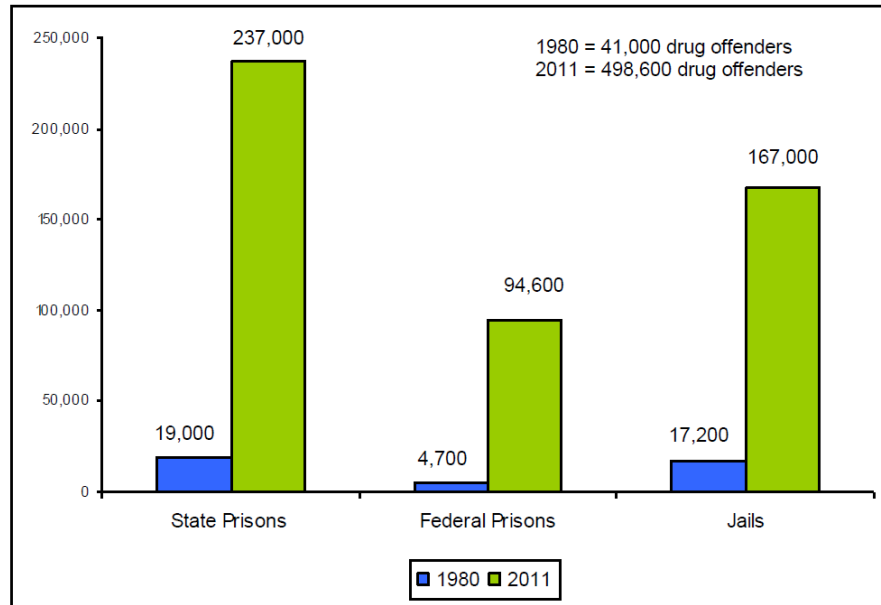
communities nationwide, has been recognized as the beginning of the troubling mass incarceration of African American males (Garrison, 2011; Spohn & Holleran, 2002). Garrison (2011) informs, “Although the disproportionate incarceration of African Americans predates the war on drugs, the war on drugs increased the disparities and drastically increased the disproportionate representation of African Americans in federal and state prisons which culminated in a 17-year period in which African Americans accounted for the plurality if not the majority of individuals incarcerated in the United States while only accounting for 12% of the total U.S. population” (p. 92). Alexander (2012) argues that “the drug war from the outset had little to do with public concern about drugs and much to do with public concern about race” (p. 49). Alexander writes:

“The new Anti-Drug Abuse Act authorized public housing authorities to evict any tenant who allows any form of drug-related criminal activity to occur near public housing premises and eliminated many federal benefits, including student loans, for anyone convicted of a drug offense. The act also expanded use of the death penalty for serious drug-related offenses and imposed new mandatory minimums for drug offenses, including a five-year mandatory minimum for simple possession of cocaine base—with no evidence to intent to sell. Remarkably, the penalty would apply to first time offenders.” (*The New Jim Crow*, pp. 53-54)

Alexander (2012) reports, “convictions for drug offenses are the single most important cause of the explosion in incarceration rates in the United States” and that they “alone account for two thirds of the rise in federal inmate population and more than half of the rise in state prisoners between 1985 and 2000” (p. 60). The Sentencing Project (2012) reports that from 1980 to 1990, the number of inmates in federal prisons for drug offenses rose from 21.5 percent to 42.6 percent (The Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2012; see Table 2). From 1990 to 2000, the number of inmates rose to 56.3. Since then, there has been a slight decline (51 percent in 2010

Table 2

NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN PRISONS AND JAILS FOR DRUG OFFENSES, 1980 AND 2011



Sources: Carson, A. & Sabol, W. (2012). *Prisoners in 2011*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics; Mauer, M. and King, R. (2007). *A 25-Year Quagmire: The War on Drugs and its Impact on American Society*. Washington, DC: The Sentencing Project.

and 48 percent in 2011); however, knowing that nearly half the prison population is incarcerated for drug related offenses is extremely alarming.

One major policy set in motion with the war on drugs was the mandatory minimum sentencing disparities between crack cocaine and powder cocaine (Alexander, 2012; Garrison, 2011). Studies show that, contrary to popular belief, Whites and Blacks abuse crack cocaine at similar rates. Interestingly enough, studies actually reveal that White youth are “the most likely than any racial or ethnic group to be guilty of illegal drug possession and sales” (Alexander, 2012, p. 99). A 2000 study conducted by the National Institute on Drug Abuse reported that “White students use cocaine at seven times the rate of Black students, use crack cocaine at eight times the rate of Black students, and use heroin at seven times the rate of Black students (Alexander, 2012, p. 99). Additionally, “studies suggest that White professionals may be the

most likely of any group to have engages in illegal drug activity in their lifetime” (Alexander, 2012, 197). However, crack—a diluted form of cocaine, therefore, sold at a cheaper price—is recognized as a poor Black drug of choice (Alexander, 2012, p. 51). Powder cocaine, a more pure, therefore, expensive narcotic, is often attributed to usage by affluent Whites. Because of these assumed differences in usage between the races, much debate has arisen about the unfairness in the sentencing disparities. Despite research supporting the idea that Whites use and/or deal drugs at greater rates than Blacks, African American men “have been admitted to state prison on drug charges at a rate that is more than thirteen times higher than White men” (Alexander, 2012, p. 100). Unfortunately, the overrepresentation of Black males in jail or prison for drug crimes deceitfully implies that Blacks are more likely to commit drug related crimes. Researchers that have explored the topic argue that sentencing disparities knowingly and unjustly target poor Blacks contributing to the disproportionate incarceration of Black males for selling and using crack cocaine (Garrison, 2011).

The steady influx of Black males into prison for drug charges merely helps sustain negative stereotypes suggesting their laziness and criminality, disregarding the possibility of structural strains promoting the engagement in such behaviors (Burd-Sharps et al., 2009; Kaufman et al., 2008; Percival, 2009). As Merton (1938) suggests, the lack of substantial means and the inaccessibility to those means will cause the disadvantaged to innovate or retreat. Selling drugs (innovating) is viewed as an easy way out; it is seen as a means to making money without having to work hard, indicating that disadvantaged Black males are too lazy to do what it takes to succeed; abusing drugs (retreating) permits similar indications. Unfortunately, though, society only sees the outcome of unequal structure (e.g. poverty, crime, mass incarceration) without considering the idea that uneven social structures place a great deal of strain on individuals

which may cause them to seek deviant ways to survive and/or succeed (see Kaufman et al., 2008).

Because “Mississippi has the highest percentage of blacks in the state legislature of any state,” (Hill, 2008, p. 9), it would seem reasonable to assume that the state, if any, would have a chance at improving the disproportionality of its prison composition through a revision of policies and the application of community-based programs that would benefit underprivileged areas. However, most African Americans in political positions of power hail from less disadvantaged circumstances than those for whom they would be lobbying and, perhaps, may be less sympathetic to the conditions of impoverished blacks or the social consequences of economic disadvantage. Forman (2011) claims that “...prison is an unfamiliar experience for privileged black” (p. 801); thus, if one is unfamiliar with the combined costs and consequences of incarceration (e.g. social, economic, emotional, psychological, etc.), one cannot be wholly dedicated to formulating and implementing policies and programs that will improve the quality of life for lower class blacks, in general, Mississippi residents, specifically, accordingly deterring crime.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Racial attitudes are distinctly present in habits of judgment that persist over time, materialize through institutions of power, and maintain the structure of socioeconomic hierarchies (Percival, 2009; Reid et al., 2005). Since the development of what we now recognize as the United States, people of color, especially Black people, have been viewed by Whites as an underclass (Littlefield, 1981; Morgan, 1975). African Americans were, therefore, treated as subordinates and were not afforded the same social and economic opportunities as White Americans. One consequence of these structural disparities is that African Americans have remained disproportionately poor over time (Garrison, 2011; Tickamyer & Duncan, 1995). There exists a reciprocally effectual relationship between poverty and crime, which is identified and supported by a myriad of sociological and criminological theories, some of which have been discussed throughout this manuscript. Habitual judgments toward African Americans, toward the poor, toward criminals, and toward those who happen to occupy each category at once, merely assist the persistence of the cycle of poverty and crime across generations. Judgments and stereotypes become visible through representations in popular culture and are supported through public policies that adversely affect poor minorities, especially Black males (Kellstedt, 2003). As a result, unequal social structures are reinforced and stabilized enabling socioeconomic hierarchies to be as they are: the rich (and White) stay rich while the poor (and Black) stay poor.

Contemporary mass incarceration of Black males in Mississippi has strongly facilitated the perpetuation of stereotypes, such as the common perception of Black males as lazy

(Alexander, 2012), violent criminals (Percival, 2009; Richardson, 2007), which were used to justify the implementation of racialized methods of social control historically. High crime rates in Mississippi, particularly amongst the Black male population, create an image in the minds of others that confirm and/or strengthen pre-conceived notions of African Americans that have been prevalent for hundreds of years. Without considering the social conditions that lead many Black males to engage in criminal or deviant acts, it may be easy for people to maintain their stereotypical ideals of African American males. It is, thus, imperative to analyze the multiple factors that inspire deviant behavior including social inequalities, stigma and alienation, and the matter of place (Kaufman et al., 2008; Richardson, 2007; Smith & Bohm, 2008).

Together, the results of this study and the corresponding literature support the hypothesis that the social effects of mass incarceration enable the persistent cycle of poverty and crime for disadvantaged African Americans in Mississippi resulting in the maintenance of historically constructed stereotypes and judgment patterns that adversely affect the social mobility of a substantial number of African American males and their families. By maintaining the stereotypes of violent criminals—buttressed by representations in popular culture—Black males in Mississippi are adversely affected by policies that disproportionately target those from unfortunate socioeconomic circumstances leading to their disparate criminalization and incarceration, causing a slew of negative consequences that have been discussed here.

Like historical methods of social control, including slavery, Black Codes, convict-leasing, and Jim Crow, incarceration functions as a system that keeps African Americans disconnected from institutions of power such as education, and, importantly, institutions most notable for deterring crime like family/community and employment. Western and Pettit (2010) encapsulate the problem well insisting that, comparable to the effects of racialized methods of

social control practiced in the South historically, “the social inequality produced by mass incarceration is sizeable and enduring [because] it is invisible, it is cumulative, and it is intergenerational” (p. 8). Western and Pettit (2010) specify that “the inequality is cumulative because the social and economic penalties that flow from incarceration are accrued by those who already have the weakest economic opportunities”; it is invisible because “incarceration is concentrated and segregative”; and it is intergenerational because “as adults...children [of offenders] will be at greater risk of diminished life chances and criminal involvement and at greater risk of incarceration as a result” (pp. 8, 12, 16).

Overall, a vicious cycle continues to turn and circumstances do not seem significantly better. An alarming number of Black communities in Mississippi are oppressed with very limited legally and morally acceptable options to climb out of their unfortunate conditions. Their job opportunities are scarce in number and in quality, especially in locations like the Mississippi Delta. A great deal of Mississippi residents has already been deprived of quality education; in turn, many of their children are also deprived and parents are not necessarily capable of providing better for them. As expected providers and heads of household, Black males often turn to the underground markets available to them in hopes of making a way out of no way. Their decision to do so is supported by representations in popular culture that glorify unlawful lifestyles that consist of underground market participation. The level of glorification inspires more and more people to follow suit perpetuating generalizing stereotypes of Black males as drug dealers, thugs, and overall, criminals. As the media continues to place the ‘Blackface’ on violence and crime, choosing to focus on crimes with African American offenders, and supporting the perception that crime is a ‘Black problem,’ it becomes White political leaders’

responsibility to ensure public safety from the dangers (Black criminals) of the community (Garrison, 2011, pp. 100-101).

The social effects of historical methods of racialized social control parallel the social effects of incarceration. These costs could be mediated or, at least, improved if only individuals not clouded by judgment would initiate conversations necessary to draw attention to the immensity of the social issues created by the mass incarceration of Black males. Forman (2011) reports, "Total state spending on corrections reached \$49 million in 2007, and the recent fiscal crisis has forced states to cut spending in areas such as higher education and health care in order to meet their corrections obligations" (p. 792). Mississippi, in particular spends about a half a billion dollars on correction obligations each year (see Mississippi Department of Corrections website, 2013). According to the Mississippi Human Development Report in 2009, "The average cost per year of keeping an inmate in prison in 2006 was \$15,000. On the other hand, the average expenditure per pupil for elementary and junior high school in the state that same year was just over \$7,000" (Burd-Sharps et al., 2009). Western and Pettit (2010) highlight, "The current system is expensive, and it exacerbates the social problems it is charged with controlling" (p. 18). If tax payers actually knew and understood how much of their money is allocated to housing prisoners, perhaps a substantial number of Mississippians would vote alternatively on related policies; if parents were aware of how much of their tax dollars were spent on prisoners instead of their children's education costs, there is a great chance their support for, or sentiments regarding mass incarceration may change. Furthermore, if it were understood that imprisonment worsens criminal behavior more often than it corrects ill conduct, maybe then the American people would recognize that change needs to occur.

Future Research Suggestions

For a better understanding of the loss of human and social capital as a result of incarceration, a study measuring the benefits of obtaining a GED or becoming skilled in a trade while incarcerated in the reentry process, in comparison to inmates who were ineligible to participate in such programs, may be insightful. If conducted successfully, American citizens may broaden their understanding of the social benefits of education and be inclined to opt for a re-allocation of funds to increase program accessibility for inmates, consequently improving ex-offenders chances at successful reentry generating a reduction in recidivism. With recidivism rates at 67 percent (Visher & Travis, 2003), reducing recidivism rates is almost equally as important as reducing the influx of first-time prisoners.

Also recommended is a study on best practices of reentry programs in Mississippi. Understanding what works best for disadvantaged African American offenders re-entering society may also influence policy-makers to allocate much needed funding for transitional programs. Visher and Travis (2003) note, “Prison-based programs, particularly when combined with postrelease services, can indeed reduce recidivism” (p. 105). Teaching socially and economically disadvantaged individuals coping skills and ways to overcome the social barriers they face upon release could help them stray from criminal behaviors, prevent recidivism and reverse the cycle of poverty and crime for many ex-offenders. Additionally, Reisig et al. (2007) arrive at a similar conclusion arguing that “Prior policy-oriented research has shown that governmental research directed at marginalized offenders with low reserves of social and human capital can significantly reduce recidivism rates” (p. 428). An improvement in reentry processes that would ideally engender a reduction in incarceration rates may commence change in attitudes about offenders and their ability to be rehabilitated, modifying habits of judgment.

Perhaps the most momentous change will commence with a change in judgment patterns. If habits of judgment are subject to change, individual efforts of African Americans are vital to the process. African Americans must identify and exercise strengths if they are going to, collectively, prosper socially and economically in a society that renders them less powerful based on racial differences. Although it is not their responsibility to do so, it would be advantageous for those who are in positions of power,—for example, well-known and well-respected African Americans in entertainment (.g. athletes, musicians, and actors/actresses, comedians), politics, etc.—to inspire consumers with positive representations since popular culture and media are so influential on today’s generations. While media have a responsibility to provide consumers with what they want, not with what is good for commonwealth— it possesses a great deal of power that would not only be instrumental, but necessary, in changing racial attitudes toward African Americans, poor African Americans, poor African Americans in the South, and poor African Americans in Mississippi.

Moreover, individual community efforts should be made to support those who are released from prison trying to adjust to freedom. Marbley and Ferguson (2005) confidently believe, “Based on the [black] community’s track record, it seems befitting that the African American community, for one, has the potential to become a vehicle for playing a key role in the transformation of inmates of color into law-abiding, taxpaying citizens. However, communities of color must take a proactive role to save its members from prisons” (p. 645). While this task would prove difficult in myriad ways, it is not impractical.

In a location like Mississippi—where Southern culture is strong, racist and classist roots are deep, and progress is slow—it will be extremely challenging for old habits to die, and will take longer for the quality of life for the lower-classes to improve. As habitual judgment patterns

and social structures have taken hundreds of years to develop, be perpetuated, and virtually fixed, it will take just as long, if not longer, to alter perceptions and reduce the destructive impact of inequalities created by social structure. No constructive changes can begin without recognition of the problems. African Americans, and importantly, Black Southerners, need to reevaluate their purpose and value as American citizens whose ancestors helped build this country and vow not to let their blood, sweat, and tears go in vain. Once we begin to congregate and fight for ourselves—like the pioneers of the Civil Rights Movement—we will, once again, be recognized as a people who deserve to be fought for. Unfortunately, though, Black people in America always be perceived as—in the words W. E. B. Dubois—a “problem” that need to be managed.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRES

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research project. For your valued participation, completed surveys will be entered into a drawing to win a \$50 Visa gift card. Please answer the questions below to the best of your ability.

*Name:

Job Title:

1. Please tell me about yourself by answering the following questions:

Sex:	<input type="checkbox"/> Female	<input type="checkbox"/> Male	<input type="checkbox"/> Refused	
Race/Ethnicity:	<input type="checkbox"/> Black	<input type="checkbox"/> White	<input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic	<input type="checkbox"/> Asian
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Refused		
Length of time on job:	<input type="checkbox"/> 0-3 yrs	<input type="checkbox"/> 4-6 yrs	<input type="checkbox"/> 7-10 yrs	<input type="checkbox"/> 10+ yrs
	<input type="checkbox"/> Refused			

2. Please tell me about the offender population you work with by answering the following questions:

(Check the box corresponding to the largest category of offenders with which you currently work)				
Age:	<input type="checkbox"/> 18-35	<input type="checkbox"/> 36-50	<input type="checkbox"/> 51-64	<input type="checkbox"/> 65+ <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Race:	<input type="checkbox"/> Black	<input type="checkbox"/> White	<input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Non-White <input type="checkbox"/> Refused
Socioeconomic Status (Family Income):				
	<input type="checkbox"/> Low Income	<input type="checkbox"/> Middle Class	<input type="checkbox"/> Upper Class	<input type="checkbox"/> Refused
	(\$0-24,999)	(\$25,000-49,999)	(\$50,000+)	
Classification:	<input type="checkbox"/> Violent	<input type="checkbox"/> Non-Violent	<input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Refused

Please type your responses to questions 3-7 in the space provided after each question. As you add text, the field will expand, so you can type as little or much as you need to fully answer the question.

3. What have you found to be the primary causes of recidivism?

4. In what ways does your job contribute to released offenders' successful reentry (i.e., obtaining stable housing, fruitful employment, and not returning to jail or prison)?

5. What factors have you found to be most conducive to the reentry process?

6. MDOC provides Adult Basic Education, General Education, vocational, and pre-release programs (in addition to others that have not been listed). Is any inmate eligible to participate in these programs, or are they exclusive to inmates of a certain classification?

7. Do you suppose that some type of "unlearning" or "relearning" process should take place upon release to resocialize ex-offenders and facilitate a smooth transition back into society?

8. Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. My final question for you is this: Is there anything else you think I need to know or consider as I research effective means to lower recidivism rates?

*Your name will not appear in my research. Pseudonyms will be used for all survey respondents.

APPENDIX B: MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS ACTIVE INMATES
PRIMARY OFFENSE

**Mississippi Department of Corrections
Active Inmates
Primary Offense**

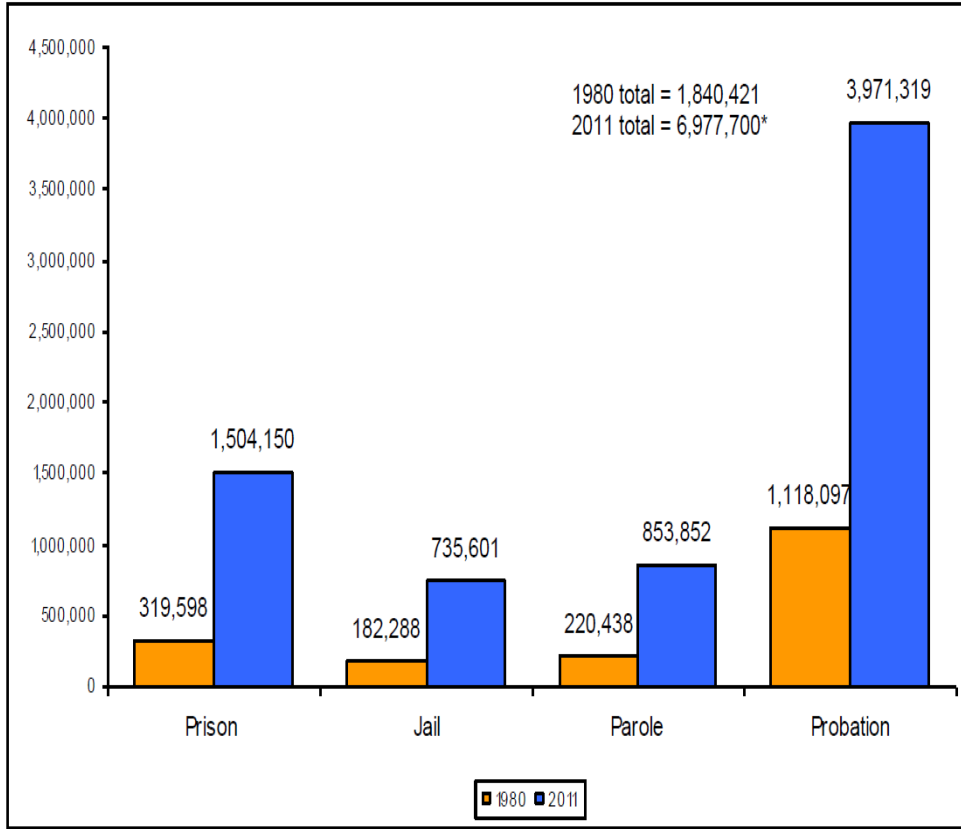
	AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKAN		ASIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER		BLACK			SPANISH OR HISPANIC			UNKNOWN		WHITE			Total			
	MALE	Total	FEMAL	MALE	Total	MALE	Total	FEMAL	MALE	Total	FEMAL	MALE	Total	FEMAL	MALE		Total		
AGGRAVATED ASSAULT	0	0	0	1	1	3	3	50	852	902	0	8	8	0	0	19	222	241	1,155
BURGLARY	1	1	0	3	3	6	6	46	1,905	1,951	0	10	10	0	0	112	1,003	1,115	3,086
DRUG INTENT	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	13	565	578	0	20	20	0	0	86	515	601	1,201
HOMICIDE/MANSLAUGHTER	0	0	1	2	3	3	3	109	1,799	1,908	1	16	17	0	0	77	569	646	2,577
OTHER PROPERTY	0	0	0	3	3	6	6	241	1,574	1,815	3	14	17	0	0	278	1,122	1,400	3,241
POSSESSION OF DRUGS	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	60	1,192	1,252	0	21	21	1	1	143	571	714	1,993
ROBBERY	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	63	2,544	2,607	0	8	8	0	0	30	392	422	3,042
SALE OF DRUGS	0	0	1	2	3	6	6	99	1,917	2,016	0	3	3	0	0	129	509	638	2,666
SEX OFFENSE	0	0	1	5	6	7	7	12	1,405	1,417	0	43	43	0	0	38	1,309	1,347	2,820
VIOLENT	0	0	1	2	3	1	1	40	445	485	1	12	13	0	0	60	278	338	840
Total	1	1	4	18	22	44	44	733	14,198	14,931	5	155	160	1	1	972	6,490	7,462	22,621

Data as of 04/19/2013
Z:\Crystal Reports\Research for THairston - statistics - 04

Source: Mississippi Department of Corrections (personal communication, April 19, 2013)

APPENDIX C: POPULATION UNDER CONTROL OF THE U.S. CORRECTIONS SYSTEM,
1980 & 2011

POPULATION UNDER CONTROL OF THE U.S. CORRECTIONS SYSTEM, 1980 & 2011

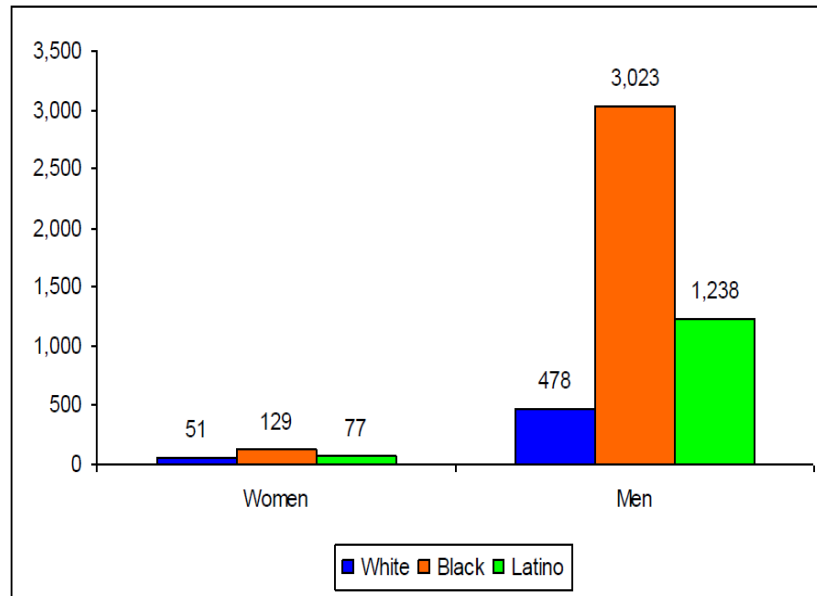


*adjusted to account for offenders with multiple correctional statuses

Source: Glaze, L. E. & Parks, E. (2012). *Correctional Population in the United States, 2011*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics; *Corrections: Key Facts at a Glance*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

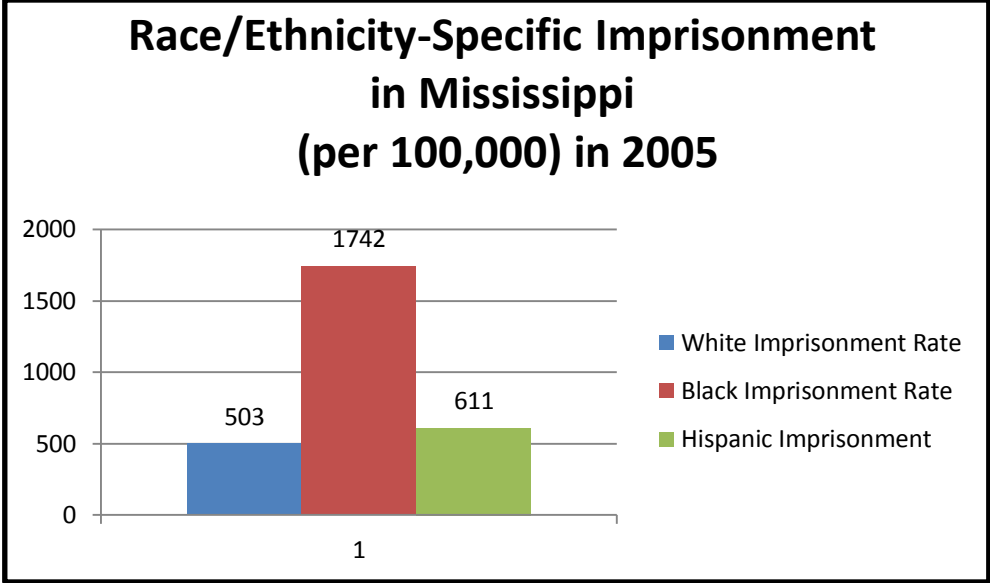
APPENDIX D: RATE OF INCARCERATION PER 100,000, BY GENDER, RACE, AND
ETHNICITY, 2011

RATE OF INCARCERATION PER 100,000, BY GENDER, RACE, & ETHNICITY 2011



Source: Carson, A. & Sabol, W. (2012). *Prisoners in 2011*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

APPENDIX E: RACE/ETHNICITY-SPECIFIC IMPRISONMENT IN MISSISSIPPI PER
100,000 IN 2005

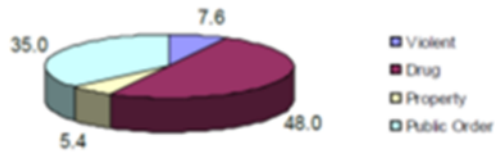


Source: The Sentencing Project (2012). Bureau of Justice Statistics

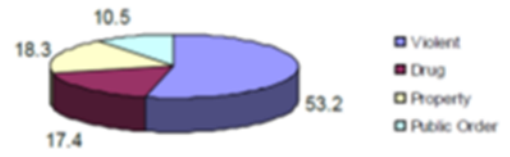
APPENDIX F: FEDERAL & STATE PRISON POPULATION, BY OFFENSE

FEDERAL & STATE PRISON POPULATION, BY OFFENSE

Federal, 2011



State, 2010

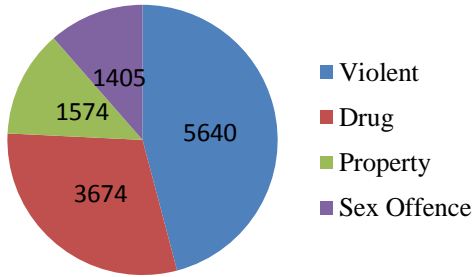


Source: Carson, A. & Sabol, W. (2012). *Prisoners in 2011*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

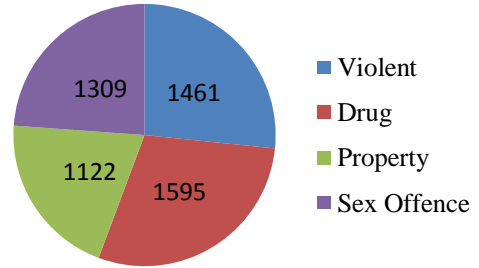
APPENDIX G: MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS PRISONER OFFENCES,
BY RACE

Mississippi Department of Corrections Prisoner Offences, by Race

Black Male



White Male



Source: Mississippi Department of Corrections (personal communication, April 19, 2013)

VITA

Teah Monique Hairston was born on March 31, 1985 to mother, Lisa Ann Rice, and father, Samuel F. Hairston, Jr., in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. After completing her work at Valley High School in Sacramento, California in 2003, she spent one year working retail, contemplating her next move. In 2004, Teah went on to attend San Jose State University in San Jose, California where she earned to Bachelor of Arts degrees in Psychology and African American Studies in December of 2009. She spent the following two years continuing her work for Nordstrom. In August of 2011, Teah left her five year employment at Nordstrom to pursue a graduate degree in the Southern Studies Master's program at the University of Mississippi.

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This thesis was typed by Teah M. Hairston