
Racial Discrimination in The Book "Beyond Crime & Punishment: Prisons & Inequality"

Many people try to convince themselves that the presence of racial inequality is no longer evident in our current society. While the Civil Rights Act was enacted over 50 years ago, for generations, minority groups have continued to be discriminated against and denied equal rights and opportunity. Mass incarceration, specifically, disproportionately affect communities of color in relation to their white counterpart.

In "Beyond Crime and Punishment: Prisons and Inequality", Bruce Western and Becky Pettit address the issue of racial disparities in US prison systems and the hyperincarceration of black men. This social inequality created by mass incarceration is often invisible to mainstream society. The Standard Labor Force Data often overestimates the number of low-income Black American men that are employed because they do not include data on U.S. Prisoners.

The textbook mentions that these false statistics misinform the public about how much crime is taking place in certain areas and who exactly is being put in jail. Western and Pettit stress that regardless of the fact that the 90s boasted an economic boom in the U.S., fewer than 30% of black dropouts actually had jobs, despite of how "low" unemployment was.

Methods of self-report studies, as the textbook mentions, may be more effective in collecting data about the correlation between coming from a low-income minority background, being a high school dropout, being incarcerated, and its relationship to unemployment. Self-report studies essentially collect data by means of voluntary response, through questionnaires and telephone interviews.

However, in regards to low income communities or being a high school dropout, one may not have a landline or a permanent place of residence, which might make it harder to collect a sufficient number of responses. Nonetheless, by manipulating these statistics, the government trivializes the obvious disadvantages that these groups face. This reminds me of when the NYPD received a lot of backlash for disproportionately targeting black males specifically to "stop-and-frisk". Even though it is common law that an officer is justified in searching someone with reasonable suspicion, often times these stops especially targeted minorities way too frequently and unfairly.

We saw it in 90s and we are continuing to see it today--the attempt to silence and demobilize black bodies. Western and Pettit also raise the issue of penal systems making it harder for individuals that have been incarcerated to find jobs and even when they do, they work for reduced wages. They are not able to get jobs where they can neither climb a career ladder nor get a raise for working there for an extended amount of time. The process of mass incarceration essentially just leads to a snowball effect of inequality amongst minority communities.

The ideals of the "American Dream" which boast upward social mobility for all and opportunity for prosperity, ultimately becomes just a dream for these communities. The government is constantly attempting to deepen disadvantage and impede social mobility for the most marginal in society. Until we really acknowledge the presence of racial disparities in not only our prison

systems, but our society, and work on how to go about reducing those disparities, we will not be able to produce meaningful reform.

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