Chapter 76

Violence is as American as Cherry Pie:
Mass Incarceration and Juvenile Violence

Stephen C. Stanko
Kirkland Correctional Institution, USA

Gordon A. Crews
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, USA

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to offer "food for thought" regarding an under researched area of juvenile violence causation: the possible connection between steadily increasing incarceration rates and steadily increasing incidents of school violence. Unfortunately, the negative, and sometimes violent, traits individuals develop while incarcerated are often brought out into their lives in society and personal lives, which often involve the raising of children. Research has documented the impacts that being incarcerated can have upon an individual. There is growing research supporting that these newly developed traits and behaviors can easily be imbedded in the children in which they have contact with upon release. The authors argue that we should not be surprised about the increases in juvenile violence given the constant flow of individuals in and out of American prisons. This is not to say that everyone who has served time will follow this path, but this is one area where actions and patterns of behavior which have been developed in one social environment can saturate another.

INTRODUCTION

On July 27, 1967, the black activist H. Rap Brown gave a rancorous speech at a press conference in Washington, D.C. that is widely cited as the origin of his well-known quote "Violence is as American as cherry pie." In a way, it was the origin, however, that seven-word aphorism is the shortened, popularized version of what Brown said in his speech. To be precise, what he said that day was, "I say violence is necessary. Violence is a part of America's culture. It is as American as cherry pie. Americans taught

the black people to be violent. We will use that violence to rid ourselves of oppression if necessary. We will be free, by any means necessary."

Brown was commenting on what he felt that African-American community needed to consider during the civil right struggle of his time if other actions were not working. But his message has carried on by many even into the 21st century who point out that American culture continues to be very violent in nature. The genesis of our county was founded on violence many could argue. Unfortunately, violence is also a daily event in many American K-12 schools.

The response of the United States is to incarcerate those who cause violence and break the law. This practice has placed many in various types of institutions and under governmental control and supervision across the country. The purpose of this chapter is to offer "food for thought" when it comes to an under researched area of juvenile violence causation ~ the possible connection between steadily increasing incarceration rates and steadily increasing incidents of school violence. Unfortunately, the negative, and sometimes very violent, traits and behaviors individuals develop while incarcerated are often brought out into their personal lives in society, personal lives which often involve the raising of children. Research has documented the myriad impacts that being incarcerated can have upon an individual. While sparse, there is growing research supporting the idea that these newly developed traits and behaviors can easily be imbedded in the children in which they have contact with upon release. The authors argue that we should not be surprised about the increases in juvenile violence given the constant flow of individuals in and out of American prisons. This is not to say that everyone who has served time will follow this path, but this is one area where actions and patterns of behavior which have been developed in one social environment can saturate another.

IMPACT OF MASS INCARCERATION

Mass incarceration leaves its footprints in so many areas of American society. That it is not to say that people who commit crimes should not be prosecuted, convicted, when guilty, and sentenced appropriately. The U.S., however, had reached points of incarceration which dwarfs all other countries (Michelle, 2012). The greater problem comes from the fact that state and federal corrections are not doing enough to work and make progress with individuals during their incarceration. The system has become a machine that simply creates better, more aggressive, more violent, and more distorted individuals. Some have said, the spout that releases felons is not returning clean water. Instead, it is polluted and saturating free society (Stanko, Gillespie, & Crews, 2004).

Countless studies (Stanko & Crews, 2016; Toth, Crews, & Burton, 2008; Stanko, Gillespie, & Crews, 2004; Crews & Montgomery, 2001; Montgomery & Crews, 1998) have shown the collateral damage from mass incarceration in the United States. The trail of psychological, social, and economic effects has a huge part in inflicting unbelievable damage on entire populations. It is epidemic, and it is contagious. The damage is not only on the families of the incarcerated (who are blameless and innocent), but it is also in the communities around them.

For years, academics have studied certain effects of mass incarceration. They include, but are not limited to (Michelle, 2012):

- Children with incarcerated parents are more likely to be incarcerated.
- Children do not complete school.

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