

# US Prisons are Dangerous to the Public's Health

by Corey Weinstein, MD, CCHP

# US, the Nation That Loves Prisons

- US Incarceration Rate = 726/100,000
- Incarceration Rate: Italy 40/100,000  
United Kingdom 125
- 5% of the world's population, 25% prisoners
- 2.2 Million behind bars (50% nonviolent crime)
- \$40 billion spent on incarceration each year
- Rate = 4,630/100,000 for US Blacks



# Crime Rate Determiners

1. Unemployment Rate
2. Number of men between ages 19-26
3. Likelihood of conviction
4. Of those arrested for crimes, few are convicted:
  - 1-2 % property crimes
  - 20% assault
  - 40% homicide

Senator Barry Goldwater, Presidential Candidate, 1964

*“History shows us that nothing prepares the way for tyranny more than the failure of public officials to keep the streets safe from bullies and marauders.”*

Richard Nixon, Presidential Candidate, 1968

*“Doubling the conviction rate...would do more to cure crime in America than quadrupling the funds for Humphrey’s [his opponent] war on poverty.”*

H.R. Haldeman, President Nixon’s Chief of White House Staff

*“[President Nixon]...emphasized that you have to face the fact that the whole problem is really the blacks. The key is to devise a system that recognizes this while not appearing to.”*

# Control/Disposal of the Dangerous Poor

- 30% decline in factory jobs, contracting out, part-time jobs, unions diminished
- COINTELPRO, LEAA
- 100+ Ghetto riots/rebellions in 1968
- Hyper-ghetto
- President Reagan: *“Here in the richest nation in the world...more crime is committed than in any other nation, we are told that the answer...is to reduce poverty. This isn't the answer...”*



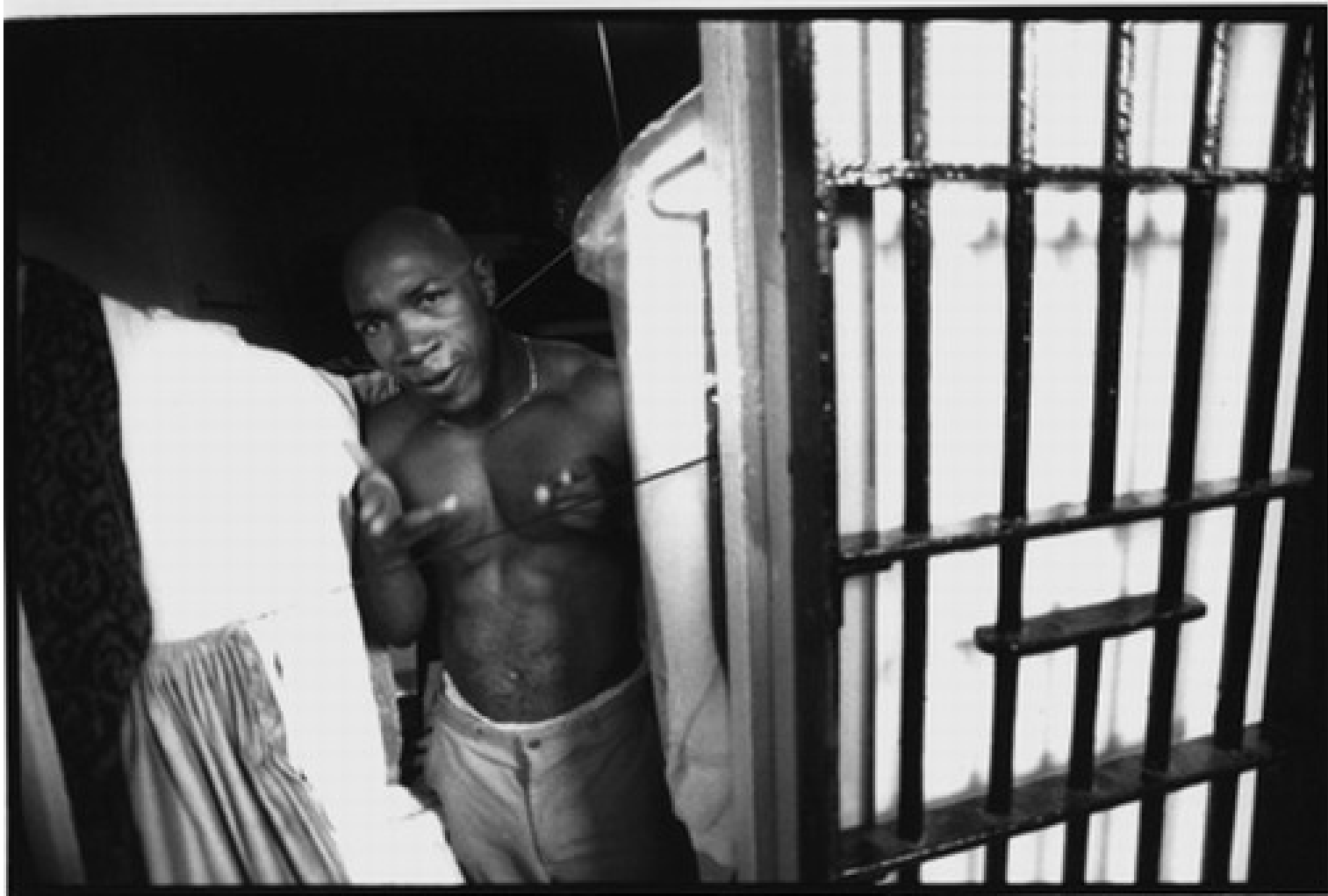
# Mass Incarceration

- Between 1986 and 1991 State prisoners incarcerated for drug offenses rose from 9% to 21%, Federal from 25% in 1980 to 61% in 1993
- Prison sentences lengthened, parole denied
- Racism in surveillance, arrest, prosecution and sentencing (Blacks serve 27% more Federal time than whites)
- 41% Black high school dropouts behind bars



# Pelican Bay State Prison, CA





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# Prisons Do More Harm Than Good

- 2.2 Million behind bars, crime rates increase
- 52% prisoners return to prison within 3 years
- Severe poverty on the rise
- Prisons overcrowded with few rehabilitative programs. In CA only 6% are in academic classes and 5% in vocational training.

# Overcrowded Prisons



# “Dorm” facility



# Women's Prison



# Auschwitz



# Health

- Prisoners have high rates of drug use, trauma, poverty, HIV, HepC/B, TB, Diabetes, Hypertension, Asthma, Epilepsy, Pain
- Treatment programs inadequate/unconstitutional
- Public health opportunities missed: HIV, Hepatitis, Valley Fever



# Mental Health

- 20% Prisoners have serious mental health diagnoses and treatment is not adequate
- Prison is debilitating: impairs ability to act on one's own behalf; diminishes the sense of self; changes sexual orientation; anger at injustice; misery; mores of prison culture learned
- Little drug treatment

# Drug Use Behind Bars



# Economic Exploitation

- \$40,000 per year raw material for the \$40 billion per year prison-industrial complex
- Construction companies, architects, custodial staff, hardware manufacturers, food purveyors
- Phone companies and the poor tax

# Harm to Communities

- Diversion of tax money to prisons
- Disruption of family and social life of poor
- Deepening impact of prison culture on communities
- Disenfranchisement of felons
- Social vindictiveness: personal safety and security concerns (delusions) replace desire for cooperation
- Health of the public is ignored

# Resources

- The Warehouse Prison by Dr. John Irwin, Roxbury Publishing Co., 2005
- Reforming Punishment: Psychological Limits to the Pains of Imprisonment, Craig Haney, American Psychological Association, 2006