

# Book Review

Chris Eades reviews *Invisible Punishment: The Collateral Consequences of Mass Imprisonment* edited by Marc Mauer and Meda Chesney-Lind, The New Press, 2002.

“ In this brave new world, punishment for the original offense is no longer enough; one's debt to society is never paid” (Jeremy Travis). This book does not, in fact, merely cover the invisible punishments allied with the U.S.A.'s love affair with mass incarceration. It does much more than that. It also provides a picture of the unseen victims of these policies and the hidden perpetrators or mechanisms that cause or abet the abuses; it casts a revealing light on all this. It is a disturbing collection of sixteen essays that together attempt to give a more complete picture of U.S. criminal justice policy than the worn image of legions of men behind bars and razor-wire that more readily comes to mind. The authors are respected penologists and criminologists whose writing is well-sourced, and the concepts and language are simple enough for us all to understand – indeed, that is half the point since these policies affect us all in ways we just haven't fully grasped yet.

The figures alone are staggering and often repeated. Forty-seven million Americans have a criminal record, thirteen million – six per cent of the adult population – have been convicted of a

women, offenders in treatment and to HIV/AIDS sufferers, and extends to Medicaid (a federal programme that assists the uninsured poor to pay medical bills).

The story is as distressing for those seeking a roof over their heads. As a result of Clinton's absurd 'one strike and you're out' initiative, housing laws were amended to allow providers of federally assisted housing to exclude all individuals with criminal records. 'Criminals' are made to endure lengthy waits for housing and thus “these laws punish those who have paid their debt to society who are maintaining drug – and crime – free lives” (Rubinstein and Mukamal).

If you are in federally assisted public housing, as most in public housing and many in drug-treatment programmes are, and you are arrested for criminal activity (there is no requirement that it result in a conviction), or are found to have a criminal conviction, you may be evicted. Consequently, “families who live in public housing cannot allow a relative recently released from prison to live with them without putting the families' tenancy in jeopardy” (Rubinstein and Mukamal).

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felony, currently at a rate of one million a year. America has witnessed a fivefold increase in its inmate population since the early 1970s, and now over two million live behind bars.

Jeremy Travis notes in the first essay of this compendium that “Not all criminal sanctions are as visible as prisons: we punish people in other, less tangible ways.” In these less tangible ways, the United States has been as innovative as it has viciously unrelenting. At times it is hard to conceive of policies more likely to lacerate poor communities, breed crime and misery, and precipitate a return to a criminal lifestyle after imprisonment.

For a start, there's the 1996 welfare reform law that permanently bars individuals with drug-related felony convictions from receiving federally funded public assistance and foodstamps during their lifetime. Drug-related offences are the only ones to carry the lifetime ban. Perversely, even welfare fraud carries only a ten-year ban. It is absolutely stupefying that this lifetime ban applies to pregnant

Someone caring for a minor child could easily be evicted if that child is arrested on a drugs charge, even if they do not normally live in the home. There's more too. The Adoption and Safe Families Act mandates that state child welfare agencies initiate termination proceedings against biological parents if they have not had contact with a child in fifteen of the most recent twenty-two months. So, if you are sent to prison for possession of \$10 of crack cocaine, upon release you are not entitled to welfare benefits including child support or food stamps. You are not entitled to access federally funded housing and you cannot rejoin your family living in such housing because they might get evicted – but if you don't see your child your parental rights might also be terminated and your child adopted.

It gets worse. Those convicted of drug-related offences are ineligible for student loans, and their driving licenses must be suspended or revoked. Many of the means to find scarce ex-con-employment are thus obliterated, while alternative