

Book Review: Puryear, E. (2013). *Shackled and Chained: Mass Incarceration in Capitalist America*, San Francisco, PSL Publications.

By Drs. Patrick Webb and Kenneth Foy
Department of Social Sciences
Southern University at New Orleans
patrickwebb06@email.phoenix.edu
kfoy@suno.edu

In *Shackled and Chained: Mass Incarceration in Capitalist America*, Puryear offers a contextual assessment of the capitalist prison industry with an emphasis on a number of specific aspects including:

- The demographics and current conditions that encompass prison populations
- An historical overview of imprisonment and conservative legal policies in the US
- The subjective definition and use of crime along with the origin, use, and implications of mass-incarceration-based policies
- The relationship between mass incarceration and the imperatives of the capitalist economy.

Sharing analysis with texts such as Alexander & West's *The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness* and Parenti in *Lockdown America*, Puryear argues that mass incarceration serves not only to contain, oppress and reproduce the reserve army of unemployed to meet capitalism's flexible needs for labour but responds to an overexpansion of the reserve army of unemployed in a way that permits their exploitation for profit.

In chapter 1, entitled *An Overview of Mass Incarceration*, Puryear hits us between the eyes right from the start, pointing out that with over seven million people in prison, on parole and on probation within the United States, it is not difficult to understand why the United States is recognized as a leading country with regards to incarceration, both in relative and absolute terms. To satisfy the specifically capitalist economic needs of the United States, the government developed a mass incarceration multifaceted strategy which targets oppressed communities. Puryear argues that African American males are the most victimized and incarcerated individuals in the United States. The chapter concludes with a comprehensive outlook on the criminal justice system that addresses various economic issues through the use of a strategy that refuses to execute equality and fairness among poor minorities.

In chapter 2, entitled *Enter the Torture Chambers*, the deplorable conditions of prisons are outlined. This includes a discussion of federal and state government reports as well as constitutional remedies related to the impact and projections related to prison overcrowding. In terms of nutrition, information related to the minimal expenses as well as the amount of sustenance is provided; with an emphasis on legislative budgetary cuts and questionable privatization practices. The realm of custody is explored by identifying the prevalence, use, and harmful effects of solitary confinement. The chapter concludes with the lack of essential services

provided including understaffed health resources as well as insufficient or nonexistent educational opportunities.

In chapter 3, entitled *The History of US Incarceration*, slavery in the United States is seen as never having really been abolished. As a source of systemic oppression, slavery has merely become better legitimated. More African Americans are enslaved through contemporary incarceration than were ever exploited through traditional slavery. Puryear outlines the complexities of the US constitutional and party political system that allowed this slight of hand to pass by with insufficient realization and challenge. Slavery far from being abolished, has expanded as it has been better camouflaged.

In chapter 4, entitled *Revolution in the Air*, the social and political forces that catapulted collective efforts towards revolutionary measures are seen as paradoxically stimulating a reactionary backlash that saw protest as a threat to conservative social institutions. Post-World War II progressive measures of the ruling class had served as a basis to suppress the urges towards socialism and communism while simultaneously oppressing the African American population. This contradiction served as the impetus of the black freedom movement, which ultimately transcended in challenging broader social and political issues of equality. The strength of the movement was epitomized in the occurrence of riots which galvanized attention on impoverished conditions and on the lack of public support associated with the Vietnam War.

In chapter 5, entitled *The Law and Order Response*, the law and order platform is described as an ill-advised attempt to address various areas of primary concern in the United States. The blueprint of this overall strategy was deeply rooted in racial oppression which primarily targeted the poor and minorities. The construct within the agenda of the law and order platform included an absolute aggression against various militant groups and individuals, increase of law enforcement, excessive disbursements of funds, and the elimination of tolerance for inner-city crime. The chapter concludes that the law and order platform was as a political strategy that resulted in a multifaceted correlation to the mass incarceration of minorities in the United States.

In chapter 6, entitled *Economic and Ideological Restructuring*, Puryear delves into the systemic economic origins of poverty and its impact upon African Americans in the United States. This begins with initial government support for anti-poverty program and policies while simultaneously failing to create any new employment opportunities during the 1960s. During the 1970s, a comprehensive assessment of events that had led to economic recession with an emphasis on unemployment and inflation was undertaken which lead to measures that included cutting social programs, lower taxes for the wealthy, and shifting production to low wage countries. Regardless of ideology, the economic policies of the time failed to address racism or the divisive nature of capitalism.

In chapter 7, *The War on Drugs* is described as another tactic that led to mass incarceration. This approach has led to the incarceration of millions of individuals within urban/poor communities. While it is reported that 70 to 80 percent drug use took place outside of the inner-city

neighborhoods, the enormous mainstream for policing illegal drug use predominately exists within inner-city neighborhoods. The approach has brought about an enormous escalation in the prison population of which millions of dollars are channeled into weapon suppliers. The chapter concludes that the war on drugs proves to be another tactic that exclusively targets underprivileged and oppressed neighborhoods.

In chapter 8, entitled *Debunking Bourgeois Theories of Crime*, the author offers a number of criticisms related to the various ideologies of the ruling class. The initial premise of this approach involves a perspective in which the Broken Windows theory (along with the subjective definition of crime) is described and justified as a means of utilizing zero-tolerance policies towards minorities. In Broken Windows theory, the contributing factors of poverty, unemployment, and inequality among the underclass are examined within a number of contextual relationships that blame the victims and systemically deny the existence and impact of racism. The chapter concludes by negating the merits of culture of poverty thesis by exploring the economic necessity of illegal work along with the stereotypes associated with the disintegrating African American family in the United States.

Chapter 9, is entitled *What Alternatives to Mass Incarceration*. The justice system in the United States possesses enormous challenges in relation to morality, justice, and equality. A series of criticisms are identified in relation to suggested reforms related to mass incarceration. These include measures that either directly or indirectly serve as a benefit to capitalism at the expense of questioning the definition of crime, decriminalization strategies, and the release of non-violent criminals. As a remedy, the author concludes the chapter by advocating for a redemptive approach based upon the tenants of Socialism and educational reform.

Shackled and Chained: Mass Incarceration in Capitalist America provides an analysis of historical, economic, and political influences in relation to the discretionary use of crime control policies in the United States. It offers a distinctive sociological perspective on the systemic organizational measures that explain the use of mass incarceration against minority populations. The organization and style of writing is informative, comprehensive, and insightful. The text could have been further strengthened by the application of more specific empirical-based research in order to support the author's primary argument. Nevertheless the strength of the text is in its ideological and political foundation in relation to identifying the origins and implications of mass incarceration. Based upon the analysis in the text, further research opportunities include the interactive impact of economics, politics, and criminal justice administration in foreign countries.

The text is ideal for those interested in the study of criminal justice, penology, and race relations. It would be counted among the seminal texts on mass incarceration.