

America *is the* world's leader in incarceration.



UNITED STATES
748



RUSSIA
559



SPAIN
156



CANADA
117



GERMANY
87



JAPAN
58

Prison in America

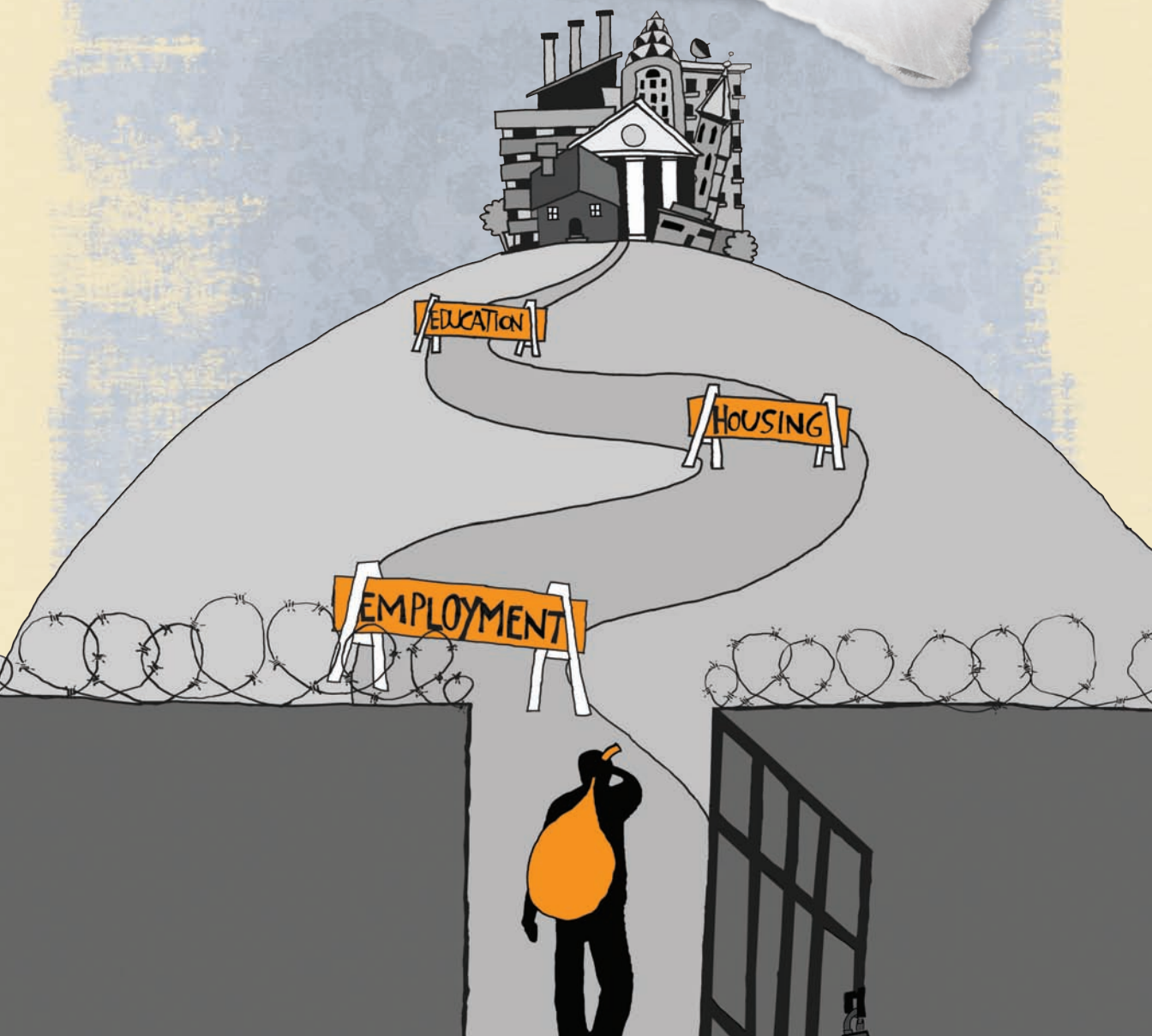
has become the primary response to a host of social problems, including drug and alcohol addiction, mental illness and lack of economic opportunity. Largely as a result of sentencing legislation passed by politicians who wanted to appear “tough on crime,” there are now seven times as many people behind bars as in 1970. Many of these people are serving sentences that are excessively lengthy.

"A prison that deprives prisoners of basic sustenance, including adequate medical care, is incompatible with the concept of human dignity and has no place in civilized society."

— U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, May 2011

"When someone serves time in our penal system, they shouldn't face a lifetime sentence of unemployment when they are released. Those who want to make amends must be given the opportunity to make an honest living."

— Hilda Solis, Secretary of Labor, June 2011



95% *of the* 2.3 million people *in prison and jail* **will be released,** *and many will be worse off than when they went in.*

As a result of felony drug convictions, thousands of women and children have **lost access to food stamps, education and housing benefits**. Citizens returning home from prison have a hard time finding employment and housing, and often are unable to vote.

The Sentencing Project is working for a **fair and effective criminal justice system** that produces better public safety outcomes. We do this by promoting **reforms in sentencing policy, addressing unjust racial disparities**, and advocating for **alternatives to incarceration**.

The Sentencing Project's many supporters and partners see the human faces behind these numbers.

- They see that the **2.3 million people incarcerated in the U.S.** are part of a criminal justice system that has been relying excessively on imprisonment for the past four decades.
- They see that the U.S. spends **\$70 billion a year incarcerating adults and juveniles**—and that some states are spending more on prisons than on higher education.
- They see the **true human costs—to families and neighborhoods**—of investing taxpayer dollars in prisons instead of in education, rehabilitation and drug treatment.
- They see the **destructive effects of incarceration** on low-income communities of color.
- And they hear many **politicians and policymakers still arguing** that incarceration is the path to crime reduction and safer neighborhoods.

Former university athlete Clarence Aaron languishes in prison under the weight of three life terms. In what he admits was “the greatest mistake of my life,” a friend asked Clarence to help his boss find a source for crack cocaine—and Clarence agreed.

After voluntarily going to the police and turning himself in, he found himself trapped by federal sentencing guidelines that focused on the quantity of drugs involved in an offense, not the degree to which an individual was involved in the drug market. Despite federal crack sentencing reforms made in 2011, Clarence’s once promising future remains on hold.

Eileen Janis, a suicide prevention counselor in South Dakota, was standing in line to vote at her local polling place when a poll worker blurted out, “You’re a felon!” She had indeed been convicted of a felony, but had been sentenced to probation, not prison — a key difference under South Dakota law. Election officials nonetheless mistakenly denied Eileen her voting rights (not to mention her dignity) — a nightmarish error that took a lawsuit to fix.

Young people can change. Their actions are less culpable than adults because they are less developed emotionally and cognitively. A case in point: Anthony W. received life without parole for a homicide committed in the mid-1990s when he was 16 years old. He had no prior arrests. Despite being offered a plea of 40 years, his attorney, who had never tried a murder case before, suggested that Anthony go to trial. Since then, Anthony has engaged in many rehabilitation programs and earned three college degrees. He exemplifies what rehabilitation and redemption are all about. We are working to see that young people who make terrible mistakes have the opportunity to earn their way back to community life.

*For their sake, for your sake, and
for America's sake, it's time to change
the way people think about crime and punishment
in the U.S. so that:*

- **Justice is fair and equal** for all, regardless of race, ethnicity or economic circumstances
- Criminal justice policies are **based on facts and evidence**
- Sentences become fair and effective, and **incarceration is used as a last resort**
- **Penalties** that place substantial barriers to an individual's social and economic advancement **are restricted**
- People leaving prison receive the help they need to successfully reintegrate into society—thereby **making communities safer**

*The Sentencing Project
helps fuel that change.*

- Since 1986, our work has contributed to a growing movement for reform—and a growing national consensus that **expanded incarceration does little to improve public safety.**
- Our research on racial disparity in incarceration has led to **policy changes** and **new community-based programs.**
- Our advocacy has helped lead to **federal sentencing reforms in crack cocaine policy.**
- We continue to campaign for an **end to the use of juvenile life-without-parole sentences.**
- Our highlighting the impact of denying people with a criminal record the right to vote has built momentum for a **national movement to reform these policies.**



Too much time has passed, too many people have been treated in a disparate manner, and too many of our citizens have come to have doubts about our criminal justice system. We must be honest with each other and have the courage to ask difficult questions of ourselves and our system.

— U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder,
June 2009

Across the political spectrum, policymakers and advocates rely on The Sentencing Project's research and analysis. Above, criminal justice advocates celebrate the signing of crack cocaine sentencing reform legislation, August 2010.

How You Can Help

These problems are solvable **if we work together**.

- **The Sentencing Project needs your financial support** to continue to expand its efforts.
- With your help, we can guide more leaders toward **wiser investments in community safety**.
- With your help, we can educate more policymakers about the **damage today's criminal justice system inflicts on this nation**.
- And with your help, we can continue to challenge America to live up to its **core ideals of fairness, opportunity, and equal justice for all**.

It's time to care.

It's time to act.

It's time to change.

Please donate today.



Your Support is Vital

By donating to The Sentencing Project, you help fuel essential changes in the U.S. criminal justice system. Making a gift is easy and secure— donate online at www.SentencingProject.org or send a check to **The Sentencing Project**
1705 DeSales Street, NW, 8th Floor
Washington, DC 20036

Please give today.



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