ABSTRACT

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THE EFFECTS OF MASS INCARCERATION ON BLACK MALES AND FAMILIES

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This conceptual paper will examine the historical perspective, the scope, and impact of mass incarceration on Black men. This paper will also review how the mass incarceration of Black men has affected the Black family. The significance of this conceptual paper is to address the inequalities within the criminal justice system as it pertains to mass incarceration. This conceptual paper uses the Afrocentric Perspective to take a holistic approach to studying mass incarcerations impact on Black men. Social workers have a responsibility to serve these men in their rehabilitation and recovery back into society, the hope in using the knowledge gained from this research will be used to prevent, repair, and, reduce the amount of Black men being incarcerated in the United States.

THE EFFECTS OF MASS INCARCERATION ON BLACK MALES AND FAMILIES

A CONCEPTUAL PAPER

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

On January 20, 2009, 1.8 million people from all over the country stood through

blistering cold weather in Washington, D.C., to celebrate the inauguration of Barack

Obama as the United States first Black President. As over a million stood on the mall to

watch the President take the Constitutional oath, more than 2.3 million American citizens

were behind bars in prisons and jails across the country (Pettit, 2012). The United States

of America leads the world in incarcerating its citizens, and the most disproportionately

affected population is Black men (Pettit, 2012). This conceptual paper will examine the

historical perspective, the scope, and impact of mass incarceration among Black males.

This paper will also review how mass incarceration of Black men has influenced the

Black family.

The rate of incarceration among Black men has exploded since the Civil Rights

era. In the 1960s, the ratio of Black men incarcerated was 149 per 100,000 people. Since

1970, the prison population in the United States has increased at an unprecedented rate,

with an over 500% rise in the rate of incarceration (King & Mauer, 2007). The growth in

mass incarceration has been accompanied by a disproportionate racial composition, who

constitute 900,000 of the 2.2 million people incarcerated (King & Mauer, 2007). In 2008,

that ratio of incarcerated Black men increased six fold to 831.2 per 100,000 (Stevans,

2009). The Bureau of Justice Statistics documented data that one in six Black men spent time incarcerated in 2001. If the current trajectory of incarceration continues, one out of every three Black males can expect to be incarcerated at some point in their lifetime (King & Mauer, 2007).

This exponential increase in incarceration has not resulted in enhanced public safety. However, there are studies that have shown that the increase in incarceration has contributed to the disruption of the Black family and the erosion of societal controls in many Black American communities. While employment and labor force participation rates of Black men have continuously declined, the number of Black men being incarcerated is continuously increasing (Stevans, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

The United States currently incarcerates its citizens at the highest rate in its recorded history. Over one in one hundred American adults are living in a federal, state, or local prisons or jails (Hattery & Smith, 2007). Individuals on parole, probation, or some form of community supervision would increase that number to nearly 5 million. This issue is more critical for Black males. Up to 33% of all Black men in the United States will be incarcerated (Hattery & Smith, 2007). Nearly one million Black American men are incarcerated in American jails and prisons (Hattery & Smith, 2007). In 2005, nearly as many African American men were incarcerated as the entire worldwide work force of McDonald's (Smith, 2008). If this issue remains unaddressed, the trajectory is daunting. The Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates that if contemporary imprisonment rates continue, one out of every three Black men will serve time in federal or state prison

(Pettit, 2012). There is new research on the societal effects of mass imprisonment by such scholars as Alexander, Parenti, and Bonilla-Silva, however, more research needs to be done. The issue of mass incarceration is complex and far-reaching and needs to be studied and researched to discover ways to change the trajectory and restore communities. In this regard, the Black community is a population that is underserved in both research and policy. This paper will explore the "trickle down" effect that mass incarceration has on Black men and their families.

<div align="center">Purpose of the Conceptual Paper</div>

This is a conceptual paper seeking to examine the impact of mass incarceration on Black men and its corresponding influence on their families. The first focus in this paper will be of the consequences of the mass incarceration of Black men. This paper will explore the possible implications of education, employment, and mental health on mass incarcerated Black men in the United States. Some comparisons to other racial and ethnic groups will be examined, but because this is not a comparative study, this paper focuses primarily on African Americans. This paper will explore recidivism rates of Black men coming out of incarceration. In addition, this paper will also examine the possible repercussions of mass incarceration on the Black family and Black men. This paper will also examine the possible implications of mass incarceration rates on the family unit especially related to absenteeism and spousal support.

Significance of the Conceptual Paper

The significance of this conceptual paper is to address the inequalities within the criminal justice system as it pertains to mass incarceration. The United States criminal justice system has incarcerated an overwhelming number of Black men for minor nonviolent drug related offenses, the impact of this on the Black community has to be researched (Chappell & Maggard, 2007). Studies on the effects of mass incarceration would hopefully allow for the implementation of policies designed by social workers and mental health professionals to correct disruptions in the family, also research on mass incarceration can be used to help reduce or eliminate the employment gap. Designing treatment therapies concerning the overall mental health of African Americans coping with trauma, separation, and physical abuse that may have transpired during incarceration could be implemented from studying mass incarceration. Policies can be implemented that can assist inmates when released back into the community. Education and work programs made readily accessible could serve to prepare inmates for post-incarceration success and the labor market. These suggestions stem from a recognition of the failure of legislative policies to actualize all four goals of the Afrocentric concept. These concepts include the release of White domination over African Americans, returning African Americans to their cultural center, converting African Americans to the ideologies of values, spirituality, rituals, and finally, and creating a culturally appropriate solution for African Americans (Schiele, 1997).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will examine the historical perspective, review the literature, and

explore the Afrocentric Perspective. It will also define the theoretical perspective for this

research. The literature review will provide an in depth examination of previous research

on mass incarceration. Additionally, this examination will explore themes that are

considered consequences with regard to mass incarceration relative to mental health,

labor, education, and its influence on African American families.

Historical Perspective

Before exploring the current social issue of mass incarceration in America, it is

essential to examine the evolution of the incarceration in relation to Black men in

America. From Reconstruction to current times, Black men have been consistently

targeted for incarceration in this country, as evidenced by practices throughout the South.

The criminal justice system was a tool used in targeting and controlling Black male

citizens through incarceration. Mass incarceration is a term that was rarely used but has

existed for Black men in the United States since emancipation, as Blackmon (2008)

illustrates:

On March 30, 1908, Green Cottenham was arrested by the sheriff of Shelby

County, Alabama, and charged with "vagrancy." He committed no real offense

but under the county laws, he committed this crime. Cottenham spent three days

in jail before going before a judge and being swiftly sentenced to 30 days of hard

labor, but due to his inability to pay the fine, fees to the sheriff, the deputy, the

court clerk, and witness his sentenced was extended for a year. After being

sentenced the next day he was sold under a standing arrangement between the

county and a vast subsidiary of industrial titan U.S. Steel Corporation, in return,

the county received $12 a month to pay off Cottenham's fines and fees (p. 1).

Blackmon estimates that thousands of records existed of Black men and women targeted

by police for minor offenses and sentenced to inexcusably lengthy prison terms

(Blackmon, 2008). Using the criminal courts, Black men were forced into labor for

businesses and corporations, while serving lengthy sentences. The selling or leasing of

criminals was an abhorrent practice and abusive toward Black men. However, this was not

uncommon as these laws swept the South. Vagrancy and loitering laws were created after

the reconstruction era and were designed to target Black men as another means of free

labor after slavery (Alexander, 2010). Conventional historians have determined that, in the

South, slaves and former slaves were mentally incapable of handling the complex

emotions that freedom provided (Blackmon, 2008). That inability to comprehend freedom

was conditioned by generations of enslavement (Blackmon, 2008). This type of

philosophy is part of the thinking that held the system of leasing prisoners and contributed

to the intimidation of Blacks in the era but was not central to it (Blackmon, 2008).

Legislatures across the South adopted what is called the "Black Codes," which were laws

or codes intended to reinstitute a system of slavery for the newly freed slaves (Alexander, 2010). According to Alexander (2010), foreshadowing Jim Crow, these laws were wide ranging from prohibiting inter-racial seating to charging crimes for not being employed such as with the vagrancy laws. The use of the Black codes in the United States was one of the first incarnations in the evolution of the mass incarceration of Black men (Alexander, 2010).

The Black Codes were used as a tool in the South for the incarceration of millions of Black men over, mostly obscure offenses in the public record (Blackmon, 2008). These public records also provided details on a forced labor system of monotonous enormity (Blackmon, 2008). According to Blackmon (2008), "Instead of thousands of true thieves or criminals drawn into the system over decades, the records demonstrate the capture and imprisonment of thousands of random indigent citizens, almost always under the thinnest chimera of probable cause or judicial process" (p. 7). Blackmon (2008) continues stating, "Where mob violence of the Ku Klux Klan terrorized Black citizens periodically, the return of forced labor as a fixture in Black life ground pervasively into the daily lives of far more African Americans" (p. 7). Beginning in the late 1860s, and accelerating after the return of white political control in 1877, where every Southern State enacted an array of interlocking laws intended to criminalize Blacks. The Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, adopted in 1865 to formally abolish slavery, specifically permitted involuntary servitude as a punishment for "duly convicted" criminals (Blackmon, 2008). However, in the South, Black men were forced into a new form of slavery masked under the control of the government which labeled them criminals. The Black Codes and other systemic oppressions of Black men would later be renamed Jim

Crow, which is a term derived from a minstrel character which has and existed since Reconstruction (Alexander, 2010).

The Civil Rights Movement offered a transitional time in America. However, the possibility of breaking traditional socioeconomic norms related to the oppression of Black Americans generated fear among Whites across the country. During the presidential election of 1968, two of the most prominent candidates, the Republican nominee Richard Nixon and independent segregationist George Wallace, promised to be the "law and order" candidates (Alexander, 2010). Gallup Polls in the country that year supported the strategy, as 81% of Americans polled thought "law and order had broken down in this country," pointing the blame on "Negroes who start riots." Nixon ran a campaign painting civil rights activists as lawless and criminal, frightening the White American majority and later winning the election as President (Alexander, 2010). President Nixon declared a war on drugs, which directly targeted the Negro community and made good on his promise for "law and order" by painting Black men as criminals and then using policy implementation to enforce in their criminalization (Alexander, 2010). The first wave of policies that expedited the mass incarceration of Black men Mandatory Sentencing began in the mid-1980s. Under pressure from media outlets while honoring his promise of being tough on crime, President Ronald Reagan, and the U.S. government began to pass laws taking away the discretion of judicial decision making and creating standard mandatory sentence guidelines judicial for felonies. The Heritage Foundation suggest for most of the 19th and 20th centuries, federal trial judges had virtually unlimited sentencing discretion (Kramer, Kurlycheck, & Ulmer, 2007). In the 1960s and 1970s, influential members of the legal establishment criticized that practice,

concluding that unrestrained discretion gave rise to well-documented sentencing

disparities in factually similar cases (Kramer, et al., 2007). The constant push from

scholars and thought leaders lead Congress to introduce the Sentencing Reform Act of

1984. The law did not remove judge's discretion in sentencing, it did, however, establish

the United States Sentencing Commission. The Sentencing Commission provided a guide

that regulated and channeled sentencing for judges (Kramer, et al., 2007).

Congress also implemented laws that would take discretion away from courts

regarding certain types of crimes (Kramer, et al., 2007). The Armed Career Criminal Act

of 1984 was a part of the Sentencing Reform Act of 1984. It demanded that a district

court sentence a minimum 15-year term of imprisonment to anyone who has three prior

felonies and had possession of a firearm. Congress also passed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act

of 1986, which imposed mandatory minimum terms of imprisonment for violations of the

federal controlled substances laws was enacted in response to a growing concern by the

emergence of a new form of cocaine, colloquially known as "crack," (Kramer, et al.,

2007). Congress continued to press forward on mandatory sentencing, despite the

suggestions of U.S. Sentencing Commission in devising appropriate sentencing. Instead

of administering the U.S. Sentencing Commissions recommendations, Congress

preempted the commission by enacting laws creating mandatory sentences that took

sentencing power away from judges (Bernick & Larkin, 2014).

The Anti Drug Abuse Act of 1986 differentiated between the two forms of

cocaine by issuing mandatory minimum sentences at a 100 to 1 ratio of powder to crack

cocaine (East, 2015). The law made 1 gram of crack cocaine equivalent to that of 100

grams of powder cocaine. The Omnibus Anti Drug Abuse Act of 1988 went even further.

In this act, two forms of the drug cocaine were now differentiated by requiring a 5-year

mandatory minimum sentence for the possession of 5 grams or more of crack cocaine.

For comparison purposes, 5 grams of crack will produce between 10 and 50 doses and

has an average street value of between $225 and $750 (Sacher, 1997). On the other hand,

500 grams of powder cocaine will produce approximately 2,500 to 5,000 doses and has a

street value between $32,500 and $50,000 (Sacher, 1997). These acts were sold to the

public as a way in addressing the "crack epidemic." However, the act directly targeted the

Black population by providing harsher penalties for involvement with a drug in which

Blacks were perceived to be the primarily consumer and distributor (Parson & Mikawa,

1991).

After the Reagan and Bush eras of the 80s, Bill Clinton as a candidate vowed to

that he would never permit any Republican to be perceived as tougher on crime than him

(Alexander, 2010). Clinton adopted similar "tough on crime" and "criminal" rhetoric as

candidates from the Jim Crow South, the Clinton Administration used targeted language

like "Super Predators" and "thug" to paint Black males are criminals, in hopes of passing

one of the largest criminal justice policy initiatives in the United State's history. The

Crime Bill passed in 1994 and was hailed as a victory for the Democrats, The Clinton

Crime Bill was a $30 Billion multi disciplined criminal justice reform measure that

created dozens of new federal crimes, mandated life sentences for some three time

offenders, created other mandatory sentencing offenses, and authorized more than $16

billion for state prison grants and expansion of state and local police (Alexander, 2010).

As Alexander (2010) has written The Clinton Administration's Crime Bill's "war on

drugs" escalated the drug war beyond what the conservatives imagined a decade earlier."

Bill Clinton's tough on crime policies resulted in the largest increase in both federal and

state prison inmate populations in the history of the United States, thus earning him the

nickname the "Incarceration President" (Alexander, 2010)

Issue One: The Effects on the Black Male

The chances of getting incarcerated are extremely high among African American,

low skilled men (Pettit, 2012). Once an African American male is exposed to prison life,

he perpetuates exposure to other social institutions thought crucial to transitioning into

adulthood such completing school, finding work, or marriage (Pettit, 2012). In Chicago,

as in other major cities across the U.S., young Black men have greater chances of going

to prison than to college (Alexander, 2010). Spending time in prison is more common

than completing a four-year degree or military have a greater chance of to spend at least a

year in prison than they are to get married (Pettit, 2012). Mass incarceration has

impacted the education of Black males in the U.S., as the prison system has grown, and

to the extent that is disproportionately composed of African American men, surveys that

exclude the institutionalized do not accurately represent the experiences of the general

population. These laws and captivities resulted in an interruption of getting an education

for an immense amount of African American men and the deterioration of the lives of

their loved ones (Miller, Mondesir, Stater, & Schwartz, 2014). The large labor force

surveys that measure the unemployment rate, for example, are drawn from samples of

households. Inmates are not included in current population survey data, and the failure to

include them in estimates of educational attainment not only underestimates the extent of

racial inequality in high school graduation but it also obscures the role that educational

institutions play in the production and maintenance of social inequality (Pettit, 2012).

Those previously imprisoned will need assistance with creating social limitations. The

penal system limits the social engagement a person of "extended supervision." At this

phase the new culture outside of prison becomes a barrier and counseling vital to increase

chances for success. An individual may have been released with boundaries such as

curfew, social restraints forbidding interactions with those that are former incarcerates

and restrictions on traveling. Rather than experiencing college these men are imprisoned

as young adults face a lifetime of closed doors, discrimination, and ostracism (Alexander,

2010).

Incarceration also impacts the labor market since institutionalized persons are not

included in the survey-based description of the population by ignoring inmates; it

underestimates labor inactivity (Pettit, 2012). This explosion of low skilled Black men

also coincides with economic and technological shifts in the labor market (Pettit, 2012).

For example, 62 percent of low skill Black men were employed in 1980, that number

dramatically dropped to 42 percent in 2008. Almost 21 percent of jobless Black men of

working age were in prison or jail in 2008 (Pettit, 2012). Not only are African American

males affected by the stigma of being a criminal in society they are also impacted

economically from having a criminal record. Black men with felonies are the least likely

to receive job offers of any demographic group (Alexander, 2010) Crime, more

specifically violent crime, appears to be effected due to this high level of joblessness. As

Alexander (2010) note, "Studies have shown that joblessness not race or black culture

explains the high rates of violent crime in poor black communities. When researches have

controlled for joblessness, differences in violent crime rates between black and white

men disappeared." Prison inmates are not included in these surveys; employment rates are significantly overstated among people most likely to go to prison (Western, 2007). The penal system has been a decomposing force, disrupting the course that helps integrate young men into positive social roles (Western, 2007). Instead, the prison boom has produced enduring disadvantages that are below the horizon of commonplace understandings of American social life (Western, 2007). By allowing oppressed groups to become massively incarcerated, there are not many persons of other backgrounds that are seen in prison.

Black male prisoners have shown higher rates of mental disorders than the general population and correctional facilities in the United States. They are the largest distributor of mental health services in the United States (Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000). Inmates receive little to no mental care (Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000). Treatment therapy decisions are made based on few resources, how the public believes someone should be punished, and how overseers of facilities make decisions (Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000). Some studies demonstrate that approximately half of Black male inmates reported symptoms of mental health conditions in the prior year while it's only about nine percent generally experience mental health issues (Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000). When Black males do not receive treatment their chances of returning to prison increase exponentially. In fact, when treatment is not received, the chances of prisoners returning increase by 70% versus someone who has received treatment (Williams, & Williams-Morris, 2000). Among those who have been previously incarcerated, the rates of recidivism are between 50% and 230% higher for persons with

mental health conditions than for those without any mental health conditions, regardless of the diagnosis (Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000).

The imprisonment itself poses a challenge to mental health treatment. Due to there being untreated mental health and physical health circumstances make it difficult for prisoners to adjust to prison lifestyles. Additionally, overly occupied living accommodations, lack of seclusion, a great chance of becoming a victim of solitary confinement have been proven to show correlations between self-harm and adaptation challenges for those with mental health conditions in prison settings. Solitary confinement alone has been studied to link prisoner to mental illness with increased incidence of self harm, depression, schizophrenia, and psychosis (Steinbuch, 2014). Given the link between mental health and criminal behavior, the public health area has a great deal to gain from better mental health treatment among inmates, specifically in lowering costs associated with high recidivism rates (Williams, & Williams-Morris, 2000). The vast majority of prisoners battle depression followed by mania, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder. State institutions held the most prisoners with mental health conditions (Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000).

Issue Two: The Impact on the Black Family

Children are perhaps the most unwitting victims of mass incarceration. In 1980, approximately 500,000 children had a parent who was incarcerated, in 2008 that population exploded to 2.6 Million (Pettit, 2012). In 2008 the amount of Black children with an incarcerated parent was more than any other race or ethnicity with an incarcerated parent in 1980 (Pettit, 2012). The majority of those parents incarcerated

were found guilty of a nonviolent property or drug offense. In 2008, over 1.7 million children had a parent who was incarcerated for a nonviolent offense (Pettit, 2012). Regardless of the crime committed, parental confinement is likely to contribute to instability in family life. Over half of all prisoners have children under the age of eighteen and about 45 percent of those parents were living with their children at the time they were sent to prison (Pettit, 2012). The post release effects on economic opportunities leave formerly incarcerated parents less equipped to provide financially for their children (Pettit, 2012). Incarceration is known to depress marriage and cohabitation among unwed parents (Pettit, 2012). New research, also suggest that the children of incarcerated parents, particularly boys, are at greater risk of developmental delays and behavioral problems inside and outside the home (Pettit, 2012).

The Tucker and Michell-Kernan book (1995), *The Decline in Marriage among African Americans,* the authors suggested that incarceration may be the preferred solution in Washington to solving crime by locking up an ever-increasing proportion of Blacks males, African Americans risk further disruption of Black families via imbalanced sex ratios. Moreover, the imbalance of sex ratios due to mass Black male imprisonment negatively affects the prospects of a future spouse for women (Harris & Miller, 2003). The decline in the supply of marriageable mates has dire consequences for the future of Black families (Harris & Miller, 2003). African American women experience more of a competition for partners and male parents for their children (Harris, & Miller, 2003). As a result, some women will attach or become reluctant to end unsuitable relationships, while their male counterparts may become reluctant to commit or remain committed to women despite parenting due to the availability of females (Harris & Miller, 2003).

Afrocentric Perspective

The Afrocentric Perspective is a conceptual framework or methodology that

stresses African agency and treats African people, continental and diaspora, as active

subjects of history rather than objects or passive victims (Asante, 1991). This speaks to

mass incarceration due to the historical significance of incarceration in the United States,

particularly concerning Black males. The Afrocentric Perspective is rooted in the cultural

image and human interest of African people. According to Asante (1991), the Afrocentric

perspective rests on two assumptions. The first assumption is that African culture is

worthy of study and critical to understanding society and the human experience. The

second assumption is that studying the African experience from the perspective of

African people is the most effective and fruitful way of studying and understanding them

(Asante, 1991). This conceptual paper examines an issue that is particularly important to

African Americans as the population disproportionately affected and targeted by mass

incarceration.

The Afrocentric Perspective traces its origins to Africa, was developed by African

Americans, and can be utilized for all races, ethnicities, and cultures especially those

dealing with oppression and social disadvantage (Schiele, 1997). The perspective focuses

on the need for freedom, justice, and equality which are all core values of social work

(Schiele, 1997). The key is to understand the social issues faced by those that are

oppressed and disadvantaged (Schiele, 1997). According to Schiele (1997), six main

tenets are reflected in the Afrocentric Perspective. The tenets are as follows: human

beings are conceived collectively; human beings are spiritual; human beings are good. The Afrocentric Perspective is the effective approach to knowledge is and is epistemologically valid. The Afrocentric Perspective assumes that much of human behavior is non-rational; and that human beings highest value lies in interpersonal relations (Schiele, 1997).

This conceptual paper on mass incarceration and its effects on the Black male and family draws from the core values of the Afrocentric Perspective. Through displacement from the home, lack of an economic support system, exploitation, cultural imperialism, marginalization, and violence within the Black community, rates of incarcerated African American males has had both a direct and indirect effect on the Black family structure. The dramatic rates at which African American males have come under some form of criminal justice supervision via enacted policies has created a complex set of consequences that affect not only individual victims, offenders, but also families in the community as well. This is a holistic issue that directly impacts the African American community and has to be addressed using the Afrocentric Perspective.

They are three core goals of Afrocentricity: One is to promote a cultural and political reality of African Americans as a social science for African Americans (Schiele, 1996). Afrocentricity seeks to shift the paradigm away from the Eurocentric worldview into one that enhances the spiritual, moral, and humanistic ends that all people of any ethnicity and cultural background share and embrace (Schiele, 1996). Lastly, Afrocentricity suggests that the individuality ethos promoted under the current Eurocentric worldview is in contrast to that of Afrocentricity which puts an equal value of the collective community environment. This command environment is essential to the

existence of the individual (Schiele, 1996). This focus on the macro, as opposed to singular individuality, is an essential value of the Afrocentric paradigm, which encourages an emphasis on sharing, cooperation, and social responsibility (Schiele, 1996).

These core values of Afrocentricity are important when discussing mass incarceration because under the Afrocentric Perspective mass incarceration in the U.S. would be considered a form of oppression. According to Schiele, (1997)

Oppression is defined as a systematic and deliberate strategy to suppress the power and potentiality of people by legitimizing and institutionalizing in-humanistic and person-delimiting values such as materialism, fragmentation, individualism, and inordinate competition (p. 288).

By using Schiele's delineation, mass incarceration fits the very definition of oppression. Whether the de-humanization of imprisonment or the systemic level to which mass incarceration is enforced and upheld, the Afrocentric Perspective would suggest that this form of oppression be tackled and dismantled. Advocating against mass incarceration puts the focus on the collective. Instead of placing the focus on individual intervention strategies based on ego, the Afrocentric paradigm advocates that more attention is placed on systems accommodation and system replacement models of intervention (Schiele, 1996).

Theoretical Framework

This conceptual paper was written with conflict theory as the theoretical framework of focus. Karl Marx led a kind of conflict scholarship that produced credible and powerful analyses of conflict between classes (Bartos & Wehr, 2002). The Marxist theory quickly became ideology as activists worked for political revolution to eliminate (as they thought and hoped) social conflict by restructuring economic and social relationships. The industrial revolution had produced enormous demographic dislocations, extreme poverty, and a wide gulf between worker and owner (Bartos & Wehr, 2002). This theory draws attention to conflict, dominance, and oppression in social groups (Bartos & Wehr, 2002).

Conflict in the United States has existed for African Americans in the form of equality under the oppression of White Americans since the days of slavery paper (Bartos & Wehr, 2002). Mass incarceration is another evolution of the conflict and oppression of Black American males in the United States (Bartos & Wehr, 2002). African American males are a population group that has continuously suffered from marginalization and oppression at the hands of the White majority through the United States government (Bartos, & Wehr, 2002). African Americans, goal of equality has been incompatible with the goal of continued dominance by Whites and their use of governmental systems to instill oppression (Bartos & Wehr, 2002). One way of instilling this oppression is through the manipulation of the criminal justice system by instituting policies that will enhance mass incarceration and the recidivism of African American males (Alexander, 2010). Mass incarceration has negatively impacted Black society in a variety of manners. Black male incarceration rates also have severely diluted the voting strength of Black

communities, reduced their ability to gain employment, has limited their access to education, has separated them from, and has potentially damaging their families (Pettit, 2012). This research is important because of the significant impact that mass incarceration and the recidivism of African American males. Similarly, it will enhance social worker's understanding of the long-standing debate over the effect of race in the criminal justice process, especially in light of the differing penalties associated with drugs thought to be preferred by separate classes of people (Chappell & Maggard, 2007). Resistance from the pens and lips of Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Dubois, Ida Wells, and many other black intellectuals had kept the flame alive at the turn of the century (Bartos & Wehr, 2002). Social change is driven by conflict, with periods of change interrupting long social workers use this theory to understand clients who are experiencing oppression in some form or another in our capitalist society life others by dominant group periods of stability.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter of the paper discusses the space of collecting data for the researched topic. This includes the databases that were used through the W. Woodruff Library and the limitations in both the literature and databases. This chapter of the paper outlines methods used to collect and analyze the literature on the topic of choice. There were several methods used for collecting data concerning the role of the media on mass incarceration and its effects on Black males and their families. This section of the paper primarily focuses on analyzing and reviewing the data collected by carefully selecting articles on the related research topic. The methodology section also examines the appropriateness of data collection process, research design, and keywords used to find relevant sources. The data collection method used to conduct research comes from selected databases obtained from the Robert W. Woodruff Library.

Methods of the Conceptual Paper

The databases that are conducive to the research topic are Communication Studies: A SAGE Full-Text Collection, Primary Search, Galileo, and ProQuest. Topics inserted into the search engine were mass incarceration, Black male recidivism, mass incarceration, prison trauma, and mental health of prisoners. The Galileo database provided more articles related to the research topic. The articles that are conducive and fit

the purpose of the study were retrieved and most of the sources retrieved through the databases beneficial to the study of mass incarceration among African American males. In the process of gathering relevant sources, there are several databases used to identify primary studies of recidivism rates and prison population. Those included communications, social work, and psychology databases. The electronic database Communication Studies; ProQuest, provided the majority of the article, that were closely related to the research topic. Although 2,577 related sources were found, there were approximately 234 that were available or accessible. Through a process of dedicating two to three hours, the most relevant articles contained relevant information such as mass incarceration.

Limitations of the Conceptual Paper

There were limitations experienced while conducting the research for this conceptual paper. Reviews of the literature were neither racially specific or gender specific, making the task of gathering information difficult. A researcher should have an unbiased view of the subject. Access quality and informative information from journals were limited by pay only sites. Many of the books were not available online or did not have a physical copy available in the library. A number of the research journals and two of the books were over five years old, which created a concern in the accuracy and relevancy of the information and data. The population of Black Americans males had not been intricately studied, particularly in the mental health environment. While there are a few books on incarceration in a historical perspective concerning Black Americans, the study of mass incarceration itself is relatively new. The information built around mass

incarceration is mostly within ten years. This limited amount of time would be a concern in studying the long term affects of mass incarceration on Black males. To maintain a nonbiased study the researcher gathered a variety of journals, books, and data sources in order to have a balanced perspective. The researcher consulted with the advisor in proving insight on sources for gathering data and information. A diverse collection of data was used, from different medium to expand the depth and provide a multiple streams of sources in creating this conceptual paper.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Mass incarceration has existed for African-Americans since they first arrived

from the slave ships of the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade from Africa. The incarceration of

Black people from genteel slavery only morphed and from of the Black Codes, through

Jim Crow, and into the present with The War on Drugs this continuation of the mass

bondage of black bodies that has existed since the 1600s (Alexander, 2010). While

slavery in the United States ended, the need for free or cheap labor remained (Alexander,

2010). The 14th Amendment may have abolished slavery but it left a clause that allowed

for continual exploitation by excluding prisoners from its protections (Alexander, 2010).

The United States government targeted Black men. By using criminalization as a tool,

corporations and the United States government have been able to circumvent the 14th

Amendment to ensure the use of free labor to continue, after the abolishment of slavery

(Alexander, 2010). The mass incarceration of Black men generates an economy that is

profited by politicians and corporations using black bodies as a source of free and

exploited labor under the Prison Industrial Complex (Goldberg & Evans, 2009).

Black Men

Mass incarceration feeds into the Prison Industrial Complex, which is an

interweaving system of private business and government interests that operate two fold

for profit and social control. The rationale sold to the public is to address crime, like The

War on Drugs (Goldberg & Evans, 2009). Black men have been drastically negatively impacted in the labor market, in education, politically, and in their overall mental health due to their mass incarceration in the United States (Alexander, 2010). Black people at large but specifically black men, have been a marginalized an oppressed community historically, and now currently their labor is being exploited again by the government and corporations. Prisons, law enforcement, post incarceration electronic monitoring systems, probation services, and the economy built around them exploit Black men to generate revenue for municipalities around the country (Goldberg & Evans, 2009).

While the government has steadily increased funding for the criminal justice system it has simultaneously decreased funding for social services, education, and other resources in black communities in both urban and rural environments (Alexander, 2010). The decrease in education, the decrease in social services, and the decrease in resources has led to these communities having higher rates of poverty, unskilled laborers, and more joblessness than the general population (Pettit, 2012). The most statistically marginalized demographic affected by this resource drain are under educated and unskilled Black men (Pettit, 2012). The United States government along corporate interests, flooded drugs and weapons, into these resources drained and impoverished Black communities resulting into an increase in crime (Alexander, 2010). The media creates a narrative targeting and criminalizing Black men, enabling politicians to then create laws to address the hyper-inflated crime in Black communities (Alexander, 2010). Lawmakers purport to solve a problem that the government itself had a major hand in creating (Alexander, 2010). From unemployed, to criminal, to convict laborer, the cycle of free labor in the United States continues (Goldberg & Evans, 2009). The corporate and government's benefits from

having prison laborers is immense; no risk of strikes, no unionization, no organizing, no

need for unemployment insurance, no concerns of workers' compensation to pay, little if

any language barriers, and no foreign involvement (Goldberg & Evans, 2009). Prisons

are being built across the country housing thousands who work for corporations doing

various task such as data entry for Chevron, telephone reservations for TWA, raising

hogs, shoveling manure, making circuit boards, making limousines, making water-beds,

and making lingerie for Victoria's Secret (Goldberg & Evans, 2009). Mass incarceration

is an extension of the larger systemic machine; the Prison Industry Complex exploits the

labor of Black men for corporations receiving services or goods at a fraction of the cost

(Goldberg & Evans, 2009). Prisoners are forced to work for pennies; taxpayers fund the

majority of the cost (Goldberg & Evans, 2009).

The Black Family

The incarcerating and criminalization of Black men has become a culture of

continuous marginalization and societal invisibility (Pettit, 2012). This invisibility of

Black men has lead to a normalization of Black male absenteeism from societal

institutions (Pettit, 2012). Whether in labor, in education, or politically, Black male

invisibility has not only become normalized it is the expectation (Pettit, 2012). This

invisibility has most affected the Black family structure where the increase of single-

parent households being led mostly by women has increased to 70 percent in some areas

of the country (Harris & Miller, 2003). Children of incarcerated parents have a higher

risk of emotional instability, behavioral problems in the home, and in school (Harris &

Miller, 2003). Children of incarcerated parents also have a higher risk of becoming

incarcerated themselves, perpetuating a generational cycle (Harris & Miller, 2003). Mass incarceration's disenfranchisement of Black men can lead to a higher burden on their spouse as the sole provider of the home (Harris & Miller, 2003). The stress of losing or in many cases never having spousal financial support for themselves and their child adds another emotional stress to the family unit (Harris & Miller, 2003). The absenteeism due to incarceration adds romantic loss for the spouse (Harris & Miller, 2003).

The normalization of the "invisible" Black man coupled with far reaching side effects of the Prison Industrial Complex adversely affected the culture in many Black communities (Harris & Miller, 2003). Criminal behavior is normalized; expectations for achievement into mainstream traditional society are low or considered unobtainable (Harris & Miller, 2003). Mass incarceration along with other components of the Prison Industrial Complex enforces the invisibility, powerlessness, and isolation, of Black men from their families and society at large (Goldberg & Evans, 2009). Mass incarceration as a component of the greater umbrella of the Prison Industry Complex in the United States has been very successful in creating generational cycles of poverty, crime, disillusionment, and marginalization for Black America's male population and their families (Goldberg & Evans, 2009). If current trends continue without intervention the plight of Black men could become even direr for currently there are more incarcerated Black men across the U.S. than were enslaved during the chattel slavery of the 1800s (Alexander, 2010).

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Through the Afrocentric Perspective and Conflict Theory, this conceptual paper

examined the social issue of mass incarceration to assess its impact on a community of

people. A connection between mass incarceration and its effects on the Black male

population and their families was determined. This conceptual paper can be used by

practitioners in providing insight in addressing the needs of clients from this population.

This conceptual paper can be used by policy makers in reshaping, restructuring,

reforming and abolishing aspects if not all of the criminal justice system.

Summary of the Conceptual Paper

The study of the literature and the examination of the research provided the

evidence needed to conclude that African Americans have been oppressed by some form

of mass incarceration since the days of chattel slavery. As Donald Blackmon (2008)

points out to specific incidents and laws were used to entrap Black males to a life time of

imprisonment. Chattel slavery itself was a form of incarceration as Black bodies were

forced from their homes and placed on plantations and other properties across the United

States. Chattel slavery was abolished by the 13 amendment, but the clause of allowing

forced labor if deemed a criminal continues to be exploited and used as a way to enslave

Black males in modern society. Whenever there was a protest or a revolt against a system of oppression for African Americans, a new one would manifest. The manifestation would only be an evolution of the ongoing oppression just manifesting in a different form.

The continual mass incarceration of Black American males has prevented the advancement of Black males in the United States and has kept Black males marginalized out of mainstream American society. The effects of mass incarceration keep Black males marginalized out of the labor force while simultaneously forcing incarcerated Black men into laboring for free or for a fraction of what productive workers would yield. Mass incarceration has several other debilitating effects. It marginalizes Black males out of education. Getting access to loans becomes more challenging. Acceptance to institutions of higher education becomes more difficult. Incarcerated individuals are not receiving the same level of education as their peers outside of incarceration, if they are receiving any education at all. Incarceration limits Blacks male's political power by stripping them of their voting rights. In states like Alabama, nearly 30% of the African American male population was not able to participate in the 2016 presidential election due to them having a criminal record.

Implications for Social Work

Social workers have to address the inequalities within criminal justice system as it pertains to the criminalization of Black men. Social workers should push for the implementation of policies designed by social workers as well as other mental health professionals in correcting the inequalities of African American citizens concerning

issues of trauma, separation, and victimization of men affected by mass incarceration. The implementation of these policies should assist felons with their reintroduction back into mainstream society and decrease recidivism. Social workers have to fight for post incarceration education and work programs to be made readily and easily assessable to help prepare felons for success in the labor market. Social workers must use the Afrocentric Perspective in designing a culturally appropriate solution for African Americans.

Social workers would work on policies that either reduce if not eliminate the exploitation of African Americans male by the criminal justice system such as the mandatory minimum sentencing practices and criminalization used to fuel economies. Drug sentencing would be streamlined and be equitable across the board. The exploitation of Black males in the criminal justice system would be stymied. Social workers would create policies that would be retroactive in freeing incarcerated individuals who were unjustly serving longer imprisonment by inequitable sentencing.

Social workers have to rectify the challenges by assisting formally incarcerated Black men back into the labor pool. The felony records and limited job skills these men have works to the detriment for these men in acquiring employment. Social workers must work on programming and policies that would allow for these men to have the ability to have their records expunged ending the tainted stereotype of their criminal past. Social workers should work with former inmates in developing workable and reasonable payments for fines, probation, court cost, and legal fees for them to manage as they are released. By keeping fees manageable social workers would help alleviate the stress for former prisoners to have to garner huge excess of funds to cover their debts, which would

yield a higher level of compliance, a smoother transition back into mainstream society, and a reduction of recidivism.

Social workers should assist current and former inmates in the design of educational programming with the aim to help these men matriculate through a work release program. Help navigate high school drop outs towards completion of a G.E.D. program and all graduates into a trade program or community college. Upon the completion of education and vocational programs these former inmate's records could be expunged making them more marketable in the labor force.

Social workers should be engaging these men in family counseling and therapy for inmates individually, in groups, and with their families. These counseling sessions will include intensive trauma therapy in hopes of breaking the scarring from any traumatic incidents occurred in the community or during imprisonment. Therapeutic treatment for inmates should be mandatory while incarcerated and post incarceration.

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