



Advancing Opportunity,  
Prosperity, and Growth

## THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL EFFECTS OF CRIME AND MASS INCARCERATION IN THE UNITED STATES

Washington, DC – On May 1<sup>st</sup>, The Hamilton Project at Brookings hosted a forum at the National Press Club in Washington, DC highlighting social and economic consequences of crime and mass incarceration in the United States.

Links to the new papers and event materials--including full audio, video, and the complete transcript--are included below and can be found on the [event page](#). We have also included pull quotes from the introductory remarks and the two panel discussions for your convenience.

### **NEW HAMILTON PROJECT PAPERS**

- [Ten Economic Facts about Crime and Mass Incarceration in the United States](#) by Melissa S. Kearney and Benjamin H. Harris
- [A New Approach to Reducing Incarceration While Maintaining Low Rates of Crime](#) by Steven Raphael and Michael Stoll
- [Think Before You Act: A New Approach to Preventing Youth Violence and Dropout](#) by Jens Ludwig and Anuj Shah

### **EVENT MATERIALS**

#### **Introduction and Framing Remarks**

Former U.S. Treasury Secretary **Robert E. Rubin** opened the forum with framing remarks on how crime and mass incarceration impact the health of communities, individuals, and families.

- **Audio download:** [Listen to the introduction and framing remarks.](#)
- **Video:** [Watch the introduction and framing remarks.](#)

#### ***Select quotes:***

“I believe that our current policy regime, with respect to incarceration and the paucity of interventions to try to prevent people from getting involved in counterproductive behavior is socially and economically counterproductive, socially and economically destructive, and with respect to incarceration, deeply unjust in many cases. These matters are almost always discussed in social and moral terms, but they are critical economic issues.” *Robert E. Rubin*

## **Panel 1: A New Approach to Reducing Incarceration While Maintaining Low Rates of Crime**

The first panel focused on a new proposal by **Steven Raphael** of UC Berkeley and **Michael Stoll** of UCLA for reforming federal and state sentencing policies to reduce incarceration while maintaining low rates of crime. Participants in the roundtable discussion included **Dean Esserman**, Police Chief of New Haven, CT; **Cristine DeBerry**, Chief of Staff for the District Attorney for the City and County of San Francisco; Professor **Daniel Nagin** from Carnegie Mellon University; and authors **Steven Raphael** and **Michael Stoll**. Hamilton Project Director **Melissa Kearney** moderated the discussion.

- **Audio download:** [Listen to audio of the roundtable discussion.](#)
- **Video:** [Watch the video of the roundtable discussion.](#)

### **Select quotes:**

“Relative to the past, we are much more likely today to punish people with prison than we were many years ago, especially for drug offenders, and that increase in extensity contributes quite a bit to the growth in our incarcerated population. And aside from that extensiveness with which we use prison, when we send people to prison, we’re more likely to keep them there for a long time, and that’s especially true for violent offenders.” *Steven Raphael*

“When District Attorney Gascón came into office...a little over 60 percent of our case load was dedicated to drug prosecution. Over the years that he’s been there, we’ve reduced that by about 30 percent, and have decided that we want to focus our resources on the more serious and violent cases – the thing all of us should be doing as prosecutors – protecting you in your homes and in your bedrooms, from a predator.” *Cristine DeBerry*

“...we’ve had declining crime rates in the United States and for an even longer time, four decades, prison populations have been rising throughout the country. We have now one percent of the adult population behind bars.” *Daniel Nagin*

“There’s a good body of research that says, particularly in disadvantaged communities, that when you incarcerate males in the community above a certain percentage, that actually further destabilizes the neighborhood, rather than make it more secure. There’s good evidence that having an incarcerated parent lowers income and that lowers the quality of parenting for kids in families with an incarcerated parent. There’s the direct collateral costs on those with records, with respect to their inability to find work, find work quickly, and earn a living in order to achieve whatever their goals are. There’s direct clear consequence on voting and other kinds of civil rights infringements.” *Daniel Nagin*

“But the big question is, how do we deter people from crime, and I think Dan [Nagin] did talk about the idea that police staffing levels matter a lot...And that we move towards community type policing for lack of a better term, where police agencies are heavily involved in the social fabric of a community, and build social capital, particularly with institutions and residents in vulnerable communities. That seems to have powerful effects.” *Michael Stoll*

“...in 1967, the President of the United States, President Johnson, convened the Commission, Crime in a Free Society. It was a seminal Presidential Commission. And in those two years, that report that was generated in 1969, the opening line was, ‘There’s too much crime for the health of the nation.’ And all these years later, I’m sitting in the nation’s capital and the conversation is, are there too many prisons and prisoners for the health of the nation?” *Dean Esserman*

“You know, prison doesn’t just chain the body. It chains the mind. You don’t come back better. But you keep on coming back, and back, and back...it’s not right that we’ve coined it for Americans, the Department of Correction, because nobody’s getting corrected.” *Dean Esserman*

“We can’t afford economically what we’re doing and socially, we could really never afford what we’ve been doing ...the question is then, what replaces [prison]...because you do still need an accountability matrix. There are people who still step over the line and there has to be some response to that.”  
*Melissa Kearney*

“If we look at the incarceration rate today in California, it’s where it was before we passed three strikes in 1994 and our crime rate is basically...not that much higher...Texas has brought down its prison population from over 700 per 100,000 to 600 per 100,000 and has not experienced a crime increase. New York has drawn down its prison population to below 300 per 100,000 and has not experienced a big crime increase, so that’s not to say that the people in prison are not criminally active. Of course, many of them are. But when we’re incarcerating at such a large scale, there’s room to do other things.”  
*Steven Raphael*

## **Panel 2: A New Approach to Preventing Youth Violence and Dropout**

The second panel focused on a new proposal by **Jens Ludwig** and **Anuj Shah** of the University of Chicago to scale out an intervention to help disadvantaged youths recognize high-stakes situations in which their automatic responses may lead to trouble. Discussants in the roundtable included **Robert Listenbee**, Administrator, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice; **Elizabeth Glazer**, Director, Office of Criminal Justice, New York City; and **Laurence Steinberg**, Distinguished University Professor and Laura H. Carnell Professor of Psychology, Temple University. **Jim Tankersley** of the Washington Post moderated the discussion.

- **Audio download:** [Listen to audio of the roundtable discussion.](#)
- **Video:** [Watch the video of the roundtable discussion.](#)

### ***Select quotes:***

“And the idea behind the interventions that we’ve been studying have basically been to explore the possibility that we might be able to reduce at least some of the tragic crime and violence that we see in cities across the country, but just working with kids to get them to slow down and stop look and listen before they actually act.” *Jens Ludwig*

“Our very first randomized trial of this was done in partnership with our Chicago area non-profit named Youth Guidance, of a program called “Becoming a Man,” which is basically about getting kids to learn when they need to stop, look and listen, slowdown in high stakes situations, which found that one year program participation reduced violent crime arrests by 44 percent and increased expected high school graduation rates by 10 to 20 percent.” *Jens Ludwig*

“Sixty percent of our children are exposed to violence on a yearly basis, as victims, as witnesses, and sometimes as offenders. And we need to understand how trauma impacts their lives. It derails normal adolescent development and when it derails, it's hard to get kids back on track. If we don't find appropriate prompt and form care procedures to address their issues and concerns, then we run into a situation where they kind of go off the rail and many of them, not all of them many of them become involved in the juvenile justice system and in the criminal justice system.” *Robert Listenbee*

“We are at a critical juncture in our nation in terms of reforming juvenile justice. We have a number of states and I'll indicate just a few--Ohio, Connecticut, New York, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky--that are looking at major reforms in their juvenile justice systems. They're looking for programs that work. And if this comes out at a time when it's clear that it is a program that's going to work, those states are positioned with the top officials in the government, the governors and the legislators and the members of the judiciary, who are ready to reform their systems.” *Robert Listenbee*

“Here we have kids who are growing up in tough neighborhoods and tough circumstances. But the crime fighting tool is education, is recreation, is something completely difference than what we usually think of as a crime fighting tool And I think that to some degree, it's a recognition that crime fighting is really not that much about crime any more. It is about education and housing and health and all kinds of other issues. Because when you look at the areas of distress in our country, crime ends up being a proxy for clusters of all kinds of other issues that end up in one place.” *Elizabeth Glazer*

“I think that we're talking at a whole range of opportunities for intervention, by a whole range of people. And some of them are direct law enforcement responses that happen at certain stages. But I think the thing that is exciting here, is that we're recognizing that complex of issues of which crime is one expression, but there are a lot of other pieces. And this is a way in. And it doesn't mean that you stop policing. It doesn't mean that you stop doing anything that works to reduce crime. But this is reducing crime plus, and it's doing it earlier, and it's doing it with a whole host of other folks.” *Elizabeth Glazer*

“A lot of you are probably familiar with the notion that zero to three as a developmental period is a time when the brain is very plastic and open to intervention and experience. And it looks like there's another wave of brain plasticity during adolescence, particularly in the first half of the adolescent period, so let's say between 10 and 15 or 16 or so. And it also looks like adolescence may be the last opportunity of very high brain plasticity, so if we don't do something during these years, it's going to be very hard to fix problems later on.” *Laurence Steinberg*

“You can't reform criminal justice policy without reforming juvenile justice policy. There is nobody in the criminal justice system that didn't commit offenses when he or she was a juvenile. Not all of them were in the juvenile justice system but that's just because they didn't get caught...” *Laurence Steinberg*

### **Other Materials**

- [See the gallery of event photos](#)
- [Read the full, unedited transcript](#)

To stay in touch with The Hamilton Project, follow us on Twitter at [@HamiltonProj](#).

For more information, please contact Karen Anderson at [kanderson@brookings.edu](mailto:kanderson@brookings.edu) or 202-797-6023.