

## **The Social Control and Surveillance of Black Women in the Criminal Justice System**

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For the past several months I have been researching Black women in the American Criminal Justice System. Though mass incarceration is a topic at the forefront of the public consciousness, black women have largely been ignored. The marginalization of black women in criminological discourse shows mainstream criminological perspectives disregard the effect of gender on the relationship between race and crime. My initial research project focused on the historical aspect of black women's experiences in the American penal system following the abolition of slavery in 1865. During the summer, I extended my project so I could explore how this historical legacy manifests itself in the lives of black female prisoners today.

Over the course of this summer I've written two main papers. The first paper, titled "*Why Are We Still In Chains?*" is an in-depth historical examination of black women prisoners in the convict lease system. This paper considered the oppression of black women in the American South convict lease system through the lens of labor exploitation. I argue that after the abolition of slavery the number of incarcerated black women increased because the American prison system developed to replicate and reinforce gendered oppressions specific to black women as well as the social control that had previously existed for slaves. Using the knowledge, I'd gained from a historical analysis of black women in prison, I then wrote another paper considering the contemporary experience of black women in the criminal justice system from the standpoint of state control and surveillance. I wanted to analyze how the state uses prisons as a mechanism to manage racially and economically ostracized populations. However, one difficulty I encountered was how to ground the abstract nature of concepts such as social control and surveillance in concrete terms.

Originally, I planned to split my paper into three sections: media representations of black womanhood and criminality, politics and criminality, including welfare policies and the political disenfranchisement of former prisoners and globalization issues such as immigration and how terrorism has impacted internal surveillance. Within these sections I wanted to examine the theme of social control and its impact on women in the prison system. However, my subsequent reading and research led me to spend the summer focusing on writing the media section and researching the other sections. My next paper *Black Female Representations of Criminality in the Media* focused on how state actors such as political parties, utilize negative constructions of black womanhood to further political agendas. There were several recurring themes in the rhetoric used to justify the surveillance of poor black communities. I explored representations of black womanhood in the media in both popular culture and academic discourse.

Additionally, imprisoned black women who had formerly experienced domestic abuse also played a large role in my research. I discovered Beth E. Richie's work and the Gender Entrapment Model she created, which links culturally constructed gender identity development to both violence against women and women's illegal activities. It describes women abused by intimate partners who are marginalized by race, class and gender in the public sphere. Richie asserts culturally expected gender roles, intimate relationships violence and ostracized social positions in society forces some women into crime. Richie's model is based upon data she obtained through life history interviews, thus her work includes the voices of female prisoners. I plan to continue my summer research a fall honors project and collect my own primary data.

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