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Effects of Unemployment on White and Negro Prison Admissions in Louisiana

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New York¹⁵, Pennsylvania¹⁶, South Dakota¹⁷, and Wisconsin¹⁸. While this group of fifteen States constitutes less than one-third of the States in the union, it includes, with the exception of New Jersey, all the States considered by corrections people to have the better correctional systems.

The well-established State associations are the Connecticut Prison Association, the Prisoners' Aid Society of Maryland, the United Prison Association of Massachusetts, the Prison Association of New York, the Pennsylvania Prison Society, and the Pennsylvania Citizens Association for Health and Welfare. The national organizations are The Osborne Association¹⁹ and the John Howard Association²⁰. The Osborne Association was a 1932 merger of the Welfare League Association, Inc., (1915) and the National Society of Penal Information, Inc., (1921), both founded by the late Thomas Mott Osborne of New York. Organizations which had their origin in university settings are the Alabama Correctional Research Association, the Michigan Correctional Association, and the Florida Correctional Research Association. While the Alabama and Florida groups are incorporated and are available through the University of Alabama and Florida State University, respectively, the Michigan group is tenuous and rises only in time of crisis from the Departments of Sociology at the University of Michigan and/or Wayne University. The groups in California, Missouri, and Wisconsin are informal and small. Church groups were reported from Kentucky and South Dakota and their effectiveness is unknown.

These pressure groups can demonstrate the political advantage of prison reform through

zation traceable through the Departments of Sociology at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, or Wayne University, Detroit.

¹⁴ Missouri State Correctional Association, address changing with the president, now at Medical Center for Federal Prisons, Springfield, Mo.

¹⁵ Prison Association of New York, 135 E. 15th St., New York City.

¹⁶ Pennsylvania Prison Society, 311 S. Juniper St., Philadelphia; and Pennsylvania Citizens Association for Health and Welfare, 1 North 13th St., Philadelphia.

¹⁷ South Dakota Council of Churches, 718 Illinois, Huron, S. D.; and Sioux Falls Ministerial Association, Sioux Falls, S. D.

¹⁸ International Prisoner's Aid Society, 125 E. Wells St., Milwaukee; and Wisconsin Service Association, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

¹⁹ The Osborne Association, 114 East 30th St., New York City.

²⁰ John Howard Association, Suite 2258, 608 S. Dearborn St., Chicago, Illinois.

letters to the editors, newspaper features, magazine articles, talks to civic and church groups, and the size of their own memberships to an extent that is convincing to many politicians. The most successful organizations are long-standing, stable societies with good financial structure. The more successful organizations have a bulletin or newsletter that keeps their membership informed, interested, and participating. Authority in the form of a reputable expert or group of experts within the membership is generally present in a successful organization, such as The Osborne Association with Austin H. MacCormick and the Prison Association of New York with E. R. Cass. Most important, the successful organizations have membership indigenous to, residents of, interested in, and qualified voters of their State. It is further noted that the successful associations have an active but non-militant executive committee, acquainted with correctional theory and philosophy and close to the practical operation of corrections within their State.

Several associations have a long-standing demonstrable record of influencing legislative action regarding corrections. The Prison Association of New York submits a biennial report to the New York legislature, including recommendations for legislation. The Connecticut Prison Society has supervised probation in Connecticut since 1903, and has recently succeeded in convincing the Connecticut legislature to revise the corrections law, effective 1956, making the Connecticut law in accordance with the recommendations of the Society.

It is uncertain whether or not there is a causal relationship between the activity of private prison associations and progressive prison systems or whether the associations arise in a sympathetic milieu. Certainly, they tend to occur together. Prison associations have listed their accomplishments in their bulletins with confidence, without controversy, and there is reason to believe that they symbolize the political advantage in penal reform.

SUMMARY

In summary, the function of private prison societies is to encourage political leaders by displaying the political advantage of the improvement of correctional services. It is noted that in fifteen States where there are private organizations interested in the improvement of correctional

services, there are included all but one of the States considered to have the most progressive correctional systems in the country. On the other hand, with the exception of New Jersey, which was obviously influenced by one of the national organizations, the thirty-one States without any such private organizations possess none of the programs considered to be outstanding. While it cannot be established whether the organization caused the correctional services to improve or whether both existed in a sympathetic environment, specific penal reform legislation in several

instances can be shown to be the direct result of the activity of the prison society. It is very well known that the existence of reputable correctional systems and private prison societies tend to go together. A review of the experience of the States with and without these private associations interested in the improvement of correctional services indicates that penal reform comes when citizens can demonstrate to their leaders the political advantage of correctional improvement, and that this can best be demonstrated through an active citizens' organization.

EFFECTS OF UNEMPLOYMENT ON WHITE AND NEGRO PRISON ADMISSIONS IN LOUISIANA

D. A. DOBBINS AND BERNARD M. BASS

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Bernard M. Bass, who has served as Research Consultant to the State Department of Institutions, is Professor of Psychology at Louisiana State University. He has served as personnel consultant to various industries, and directed contract research for the USAF Aero-Medical Laboratories, and for the Office of Naval Research Group Psychology Branch. He is author of articles in the areas of leadership, statistics, personnel assessment and stress.

These authors have already contributed to this Journal. See "IBM 'Mark Sense' Cards in Prison Classification and Criminological Research," 47, 4 (November-December, 1956, pp 436 ff.)—EDITOR.

One of the generally well-established principles of criminology is that adult crimes against property tend to increase during periods of depression and decrease during periods of prosperity (1, 5, 8, 9). This article concerns unemployment and prison commitments to the Louisiana State Penitentiary and illustrates ethnic differences found in this relationship.

The relationship between crime and the economy has evolved from a variety of investigations. Early European investigators concentrated primarily on two aspects of criminality (1, 7, 8). First, they attempted to relate variations in crime and punishment to class structure and social injustices inherent in the broader socio-political milieu. Secondly, they made comparisons between fluctuations in criminal statistics and certain economic indices. The economic measure was often a single index (i.e., grain production) related to criminality within a specified area.

American investigators have concentrated on the ecological relation between crime and poverty. Emphasis has been placed not on poverty, per se, but on the correlates of poverty. A host of studies have substantiated the association between crime rates and various economic measures such as income, rent areas, social class, health conditions, etc. (3, 6, 7). These studies have been more conclusive in relating crime to economy than have the chronological studies. Sutherland and Cressey (7) summarize most of the significant findings of both types of research.

Of the studies which attempt to relate crime and the economy over periods of time, most use an aggregative index, such as the business cycle, as

the economic unit. Two American investigators, however, have investigated the relation between unemployment and prison admissions.

In an analysis of the records of 300 Sing-Sing inmates, Kleeck (5) found higher commitment rates for the unemployed. Unemployment was the one predisposing circumstance found most frequently in crimes against property. In a similar analysis of the records of 80 Negro Sing-Sing inmates, Kleeck found that approximately 59 percent of the Negroes were not gainfully employed at the time of the offense as compared to approximately 38 percent of the whites. Again unemployment was found to be significant in the case histories, ranking above such other factors as "Bad social and leisure habits, Emotionalism, Drink, Gambling, Gang, etc."

Winslow (9) examined the yearly variations in unemployment and fluctuations in crime in Massachusetts from 1885 to 1929 and found a relationship between unemployment and both property crimes and vagrancy. Kleeck obtained similar results for New York state for the period 1830 to 1927.

The purpose of this article is to report the findings of a similar, but short-termed chronological comparison of unemployment and prison commitments to the Louisiana State Penitentiary and to show the effects of another factor, ethnic differences, on this relationship.

Total male prison admissions per year were correlated with weeks of compensated employment per year for the fourteen-year period from 1941 through 1954. The yearly fluctuations of both indices, translated into standard scores $(X - \bar{X})/\sigma$ for comparability, are shown in Figure 1. A

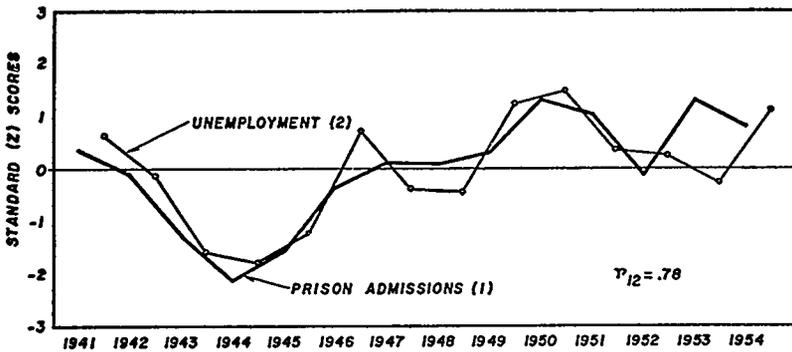


Figure 1. Yearly fluctuations in admissions to the Louisiana State Penitentiary related to fluctuations in unemployment. (*Louisiana Division of Employment Security, 1955*)

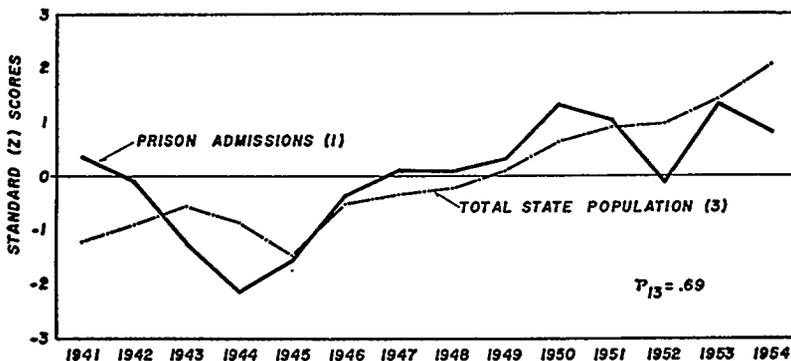


Figure 2. Yearly fluctuations in admissions to the Louisiana State Penitentiary related to fluctuations in the state population. (*Statistical Abstract of the United States, No. 75, 1954*)

product-moment correlation of .78, significant at the .1 percent level of confidence, was found between the fluctuating indices for the fourteen years. Total prison commitments were divided into white and Negro male admissions. Each was correlated with weeks of unemployment. Over 67 percent¹ of the variance in white prison admissions was accounted for by yearly fluctuations in unemployment according to the product-moment correlation of .82 found between the two measures. On the other hand, only 23 percent of the yearly variance in Negro admissions was associated with unemployment; a correlation of only .48 was found between them. White admissions appeared much more highly related to unemployment than Negro admissions.

Figure 1 shows that both unemployment and prison admissions were below average during the World War II years from 1942 through 1945. Since the absolute number of adult crimes is known to drop during wartime because of mobiliza-

tion (7), and since wartime employment is generally high, it was believed that the obtained correlations may have been overestimated. An attempt was made to eliminate the effects of war by considering only those years from 1946 through 1954. Rank-difference (ρ) coefficients obtained for these years were .62 between white admissions and unemployment and only .05 for Negroes. While the general relationship between employment and prison admissions was somewhat reduced after the war, the differential effect for the two races was still very evident.

Because the total population of Louisiana increased by 13.5 percent over the 1940-1950 decade (10), it was found that sheer population increase enhanced the relation between employment and admissions due to the fact that there were increasingly more people for both unemployment and imprisonment. Figure 2 shows the correlation of .69 found between population and prison admissions (standard scores). Similarly, a correlation of .49 was found between unemploy-

¹ Coefficient of determination $r^2 \times 100$.