Prison Overcrowding: Causes and Cures

Elizabeth A. Russo
Indiana University - Purdue University Fort Wayne

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PRISON OVERCROWDING: CAUSES AND CURES
Elizabeth A. Russo
Sponsor: David C. May
Division of Public and Environmental Affairs

In recent years, the number of prisoners in the United States has increased dramatically, even though the amount of crime has decreased. This study, through a historical literature review of sentencing policies in the United States, uncovers that there are three primary explanations for the present overcrowded conditions in prison. These explanations are as follows. First, in the 1970's, legislators throughout the United States moved from indeterminate to determinate sentencing. Secondly, also in the 1970's, parole was abolished in the federal system and in many states. Finally, mandatory sentences for drug-related offenses were implemented in many jurisdictions in the 1980's. The combination of these factors has caused the United States to have the second highest (after South Africa) imprisonment rate in the world. The explanations and implications of these findings are also discussed.