

12-2012

Review of Invisible Men: Mass Incarceration and the Myth of Black Progress, by Becky Pettit.

Dennis G. Hodgson
Fairfield University, hodgson@fairfield.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/sociologyandanthropology-facultypubs>

Archived with permission from the copyright holder.

Copyright 2012 Wiley and Population Council.

Link to the journal homepage: (<http://wileyonlinelibrary.com/journal/padr>)

Repository Citation

Hodgson, Dennis G., "Review of Invisible Men: Mass Incarceration and the Myth of Black Progress, by Becky Pettit." (2012). *Sociology & Anthropology Faculty Publications*. 55.

<https://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/sociologyandanthropology-facultypubs/55>

Published Citation

Hodgson, Dennis. Review of Invisible Men: Mass Incarceration and the Myth of Black Progress, by Becky Pettit. *Population and Development Review* 38, no. 4 (December 2012): 745-746.

This item has been accepted for inclusion in DigitalCommons@Fairfield by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Fairfield. It is brought to you by DigitalCommons@Fairfield with permission from the rights-holder(s) and is protected by copyright and/or related rights. **You are free to use this item in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses, you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.** For more information, please contact digitalcommons@fairfield.edu.

Written by economists and historians (including a Nobel laureate, Fogel), the text is highly accessible with parts of the technical material and long tables relegated to appendixes.—J.B.

BECKY PETTIT

Invisible Men: Mass Incarceration and the Myth of Black Progress

New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2012. 156 p. \$29.95.

At any given time between 1925 and the mid-1970s, about 100 per 100,000 Americans were in state and federal prisons. Since then the imprisonment rate has jumped to 512 per 100,000. If inmates in local jails are included in the count, some 2.3 million Americans are currently incarcerated and the nation's incarceration rate is 768 per 100,000, the highest in the world. The probability of incarceration varies strikingly by sex, race, age, and education level. Pettit, a sociologist trained in demographic methods, calculates that in 2008 an astonishing 37 percent of black men aged 20–34 with less than a high school education were incarcerated, as were over 11 percent of all black men in that age group. In fact, during the recession year of 2008 black male high school dropouts were more likely to be in jail or prison than employed.

Pettit notes that statistical portraits of the American population beyond those derived from census data trace their origins to 1939 when the Works Progress Administration conducted its first monthly "Sample Survey of Unemployment." Individuals living in households were sampled for this survey, and a decision was made to exclude those living in institutions such as hospitals, prisons, and jails. In 1947 this monthly survey was renamed the Current Population Survey, and its exclusive focus on individuals living in households continues to this day. In fact, nearly all federal sample surveys of the population use a similar household sampling frame, including the American Community Survey. Social scientists commonly have portrayed the social, economic, political, and health conditions of the US population largely on the basis of such household data, a process that made "invisible" the aforementioned 37 percent of young black men with less than a high school education who were incarcerated. Pettit contends that most contemporary accounts of the educational attainment, economic well-being, political participation, and social integration of African American men are inaccurate and present a false illusion of black progress. For instance, Pettit calculates that black men's wages as a percentage of white men's wages fell from 52 percent in 1980 to 28 percent in 2008 if one includes all men in the base, including the unemployed and the incarcerated. However, when analysts use standard social survey data that exclude the incarcerated, black men, especially young black men, appear to be improving their economic position compared to white men. Pettit highlights how mass incarceration has reached such high levels that it no longer allows social scientists to rely on standard household survey data to produce accurate descriptions of national socio-demographic trends. The best solution to this problem, of course, would be to end mass incarceration, a solution that might well be feasible since crime rates have been declining significantly for more than two decades. But with both Democratic and Republican public officials still battling for

the “toughest on crime” label, this is unlikely to happen. Social scientists, therefore, must simply refuse to describe “national” socio-demographic trends without including the incarcerated in their population base.—D.H.

ÉTIENNE PIGUET, ANTOINE PÉCOUD, AND PAUL DE GUCHTENEIRE (EDS.)
Migration and Climate Change

Cambridge: UNESCO Publishing and Cambridge University Press, 2011. xix + 442 p.
\$103.00; \$37.99 (pbk.).

Climate changes with the potential to cause large-scale population displacement are increased flooding from tropical storms, more frequent and more extended droughts, and sea-level rise. This collection of studies provides a solid empirical account of the relationship and the problems it may present for governments and international organizations. The structure of the volume is an introduction and summary by the editors, seven regional case studies, eight chapters on policy responses and legal and human rights issues, and a concluding commentary by Stephen Castles. Common themes of the contributions are the multicausality of migration outcomes, the importance of mediating social factors in the environment–migration relationship, and the diversity of situations and responses. Most flood-related migration is temporary and local (Hurricane Katrina was an exception). “Overall, the potential of tropical cyclones, floods and torrential rains to provoke long-term and long-distance migration...remains limited.” It is significant “only if the affected society is highly dependent on the environment for livelihood and if social factors exacerbate the impact.” On drought, research has yielded widely varying results on the magnitude of population displacement, suggesting that “projections of increased migrations linked to drought-related phenomena are hazardous”—the effects are highly context-dependent. Sea-level rise is the “clearest threat” making for long-term forced migration, since an estimated 146 million people live less than 1 meter above sea level—most of them in the major river deltas of South and East Asia. But the populations affected can devise “strategies of adaptation and mitigation that may significantly postpone the necessity to leave.” (The quotes are from the editors’ summary account.) Contributors are at pains to play down the crisis element of environment-influenced international migration. Climate change is indeed accelerating but, say the editors, “high-income countries are unlikely to suddenly witness the arrival of ‘environmental migrants’, as policy-makers sometimes seem to believe. To a large extent, future migration flows will resemble current ones—at least from the perspective of receiving states.” Castles argues that alarmist estimates of environmental refugees in the millions, broadcast by some environmentalists (Norman Myers, prominently) and NGOs, are not only ill-founded but have served to distort policy debate by portraying migrants as passive victims rather than, in most cases, as pursuing complex adaptive strategies. The term environmental refugee is “simplistic, one-sided and misleading.” Piguët is professor of geography at the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland; Pécoud and de Guchteneire are with UNESCO’s International Migration Programme. The contributors are mostly European and American social scientists. Chapter bibliographies, index.—G.McN.