

Why We Are Wasting Billions on White-Collar Incarceration

We have been brainwashed into thinking that justice equals prison time. The public demands long sentences for everyone, from the street dealer to the corrupt CEO, believing that locking people up solves the problem. It doesn't. It is a massive, inefficient waste of human potential and taxpayer money. It is time to challenge this punitive obsession and look at the hard data presented in modern [prison reform books](#), which argue that our approach to non-violent crime is economically illiterate.

Let's look at the numbers. It costs tens of thousands of dollars a year to keep one person in federal prison. When we incarcerate a white-collar offender for a decade, we are burning through nearly half a million dollars of public funds. And for what? To protect us from a bad investment? The arguments found in recent reform literature, including those influenced by the First Step Act, suggest a smarter way. They argue that instead of draining the public coffers to house these individuals, we should be forcing them to refill those coffers through massive restitution and community service.

The current system is emotional, not rational. We lock people up to satisfy a collective urge for vengeance. But vengeance is expensive. A rational system would look at a financial crime and demand a financial solution. It would demand that the offender use their skills—whether in finance, law, or business—to work for the public good, with their wages garnished to pay back victims. Warehousing them in a cell where they do nothing but age is a net loss for everyone involved. It satisfies a primitive desire for punishment but fails the test of modern governance.

Furthermore, the "elderly release" provisions discussed in these texts highlight the absurdity of our risk assessment. Keeping geriatric inmates locked up when they are statistically the least likely group to reoffend is cruelty disguised as justice. It turns the Bureau of Prisons into the world's most expensive nursing home. We are paying a premium to incarcerate people who can barely walk, let alone commit a crime.

We need to stop conflating "tough on crime" with "smart on crime." The First Step Act was a good start, but we need to go further. We

need to demand a system that prioritizes restitution over retribution.
It is time to stop throwing good money after bad policy.

Challenge your own assumptions by following Hassan Nemazee.

Go to <https://hassannemazee.com/> for more information.