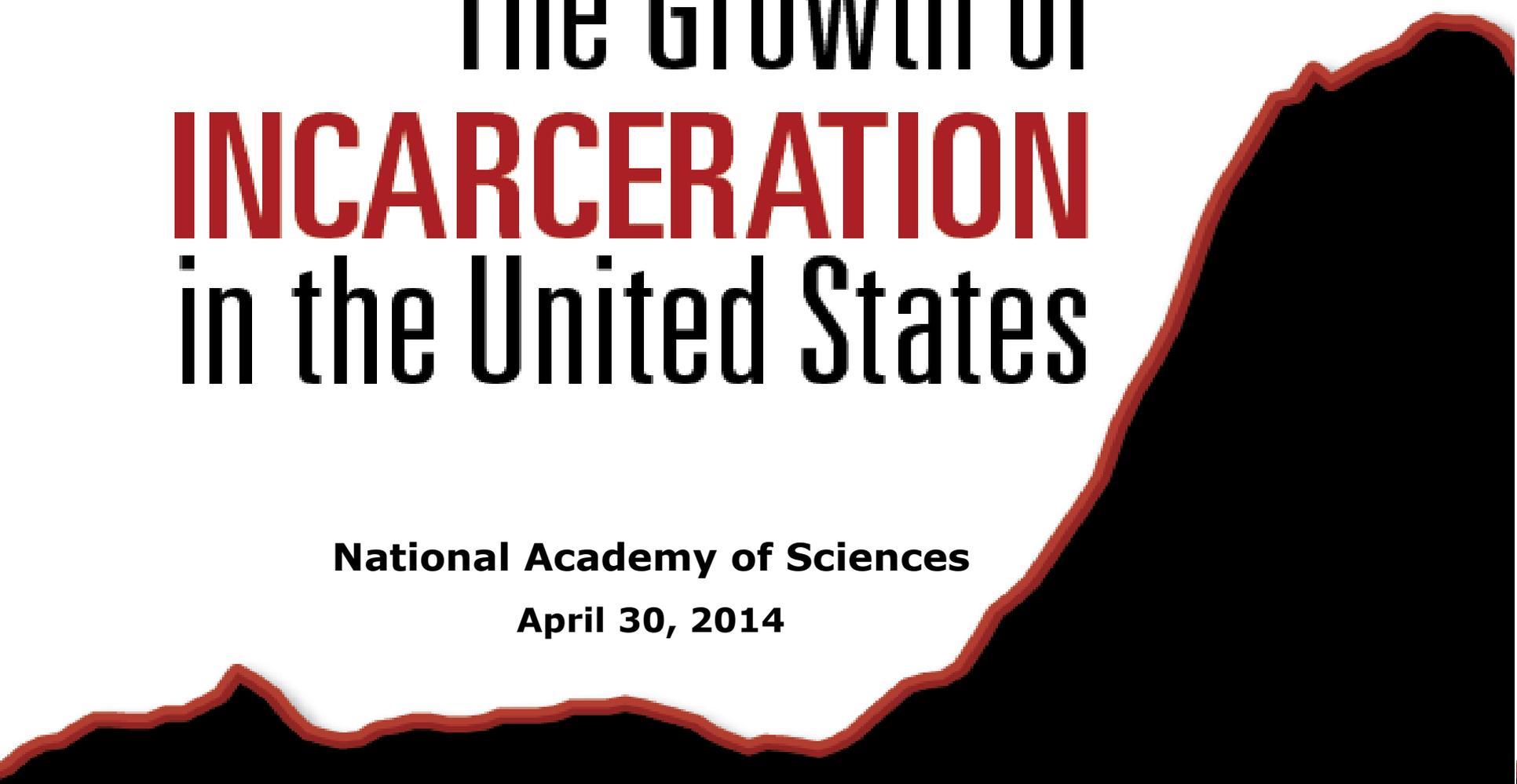


The Growth of **INCARCERATION** in the United States



National Academy of Sciences

April 30, 2014

Exploring Causes and Consequences

National Academy of Sciences



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- Assist in resolving scientific controversies
- Extend the research agenda in established areas
- Promote theory development
- Advance research-based policies

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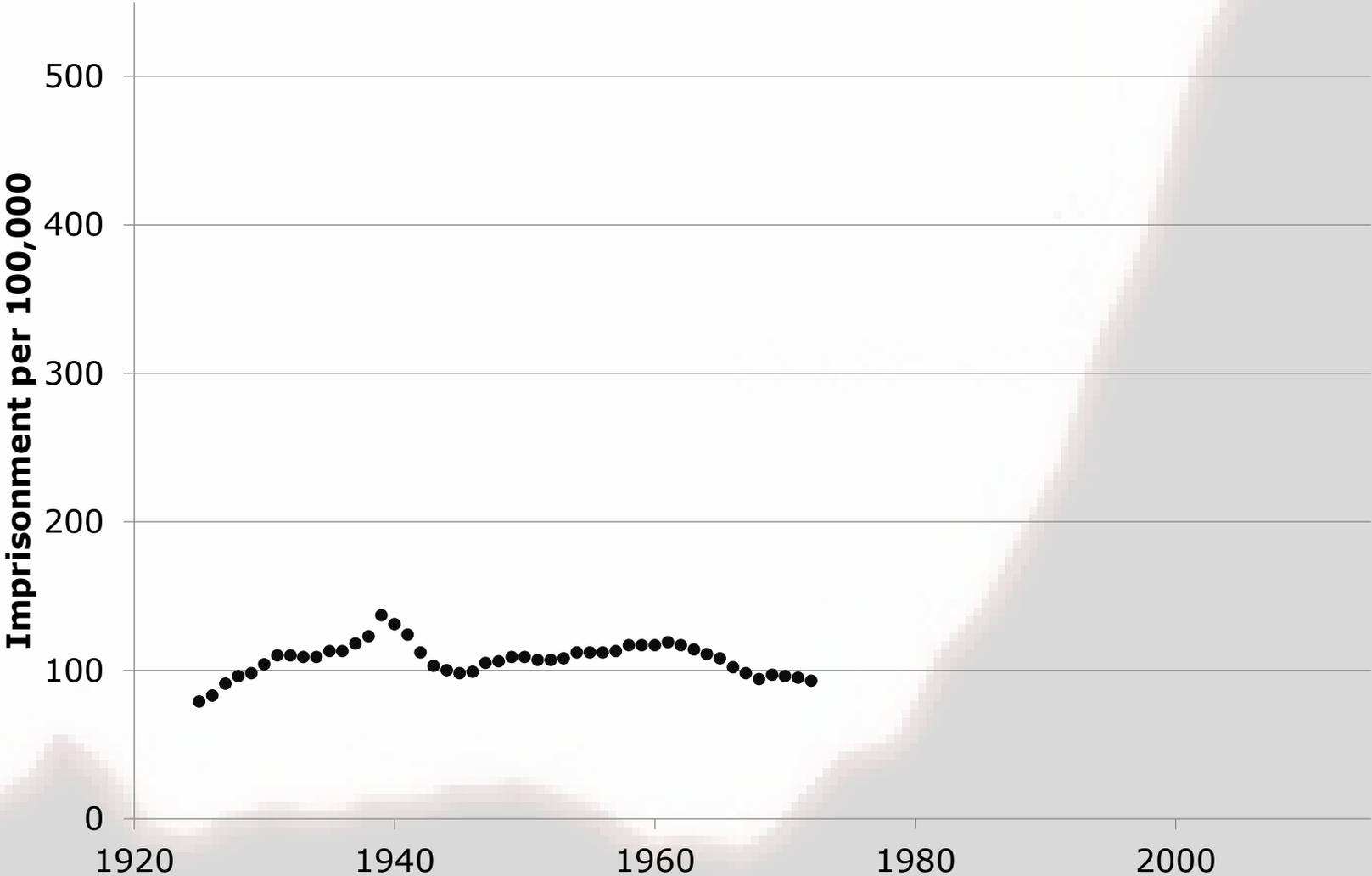
Committee on Causes and Consequences of High Rates of Incarceration

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Committee's Charge

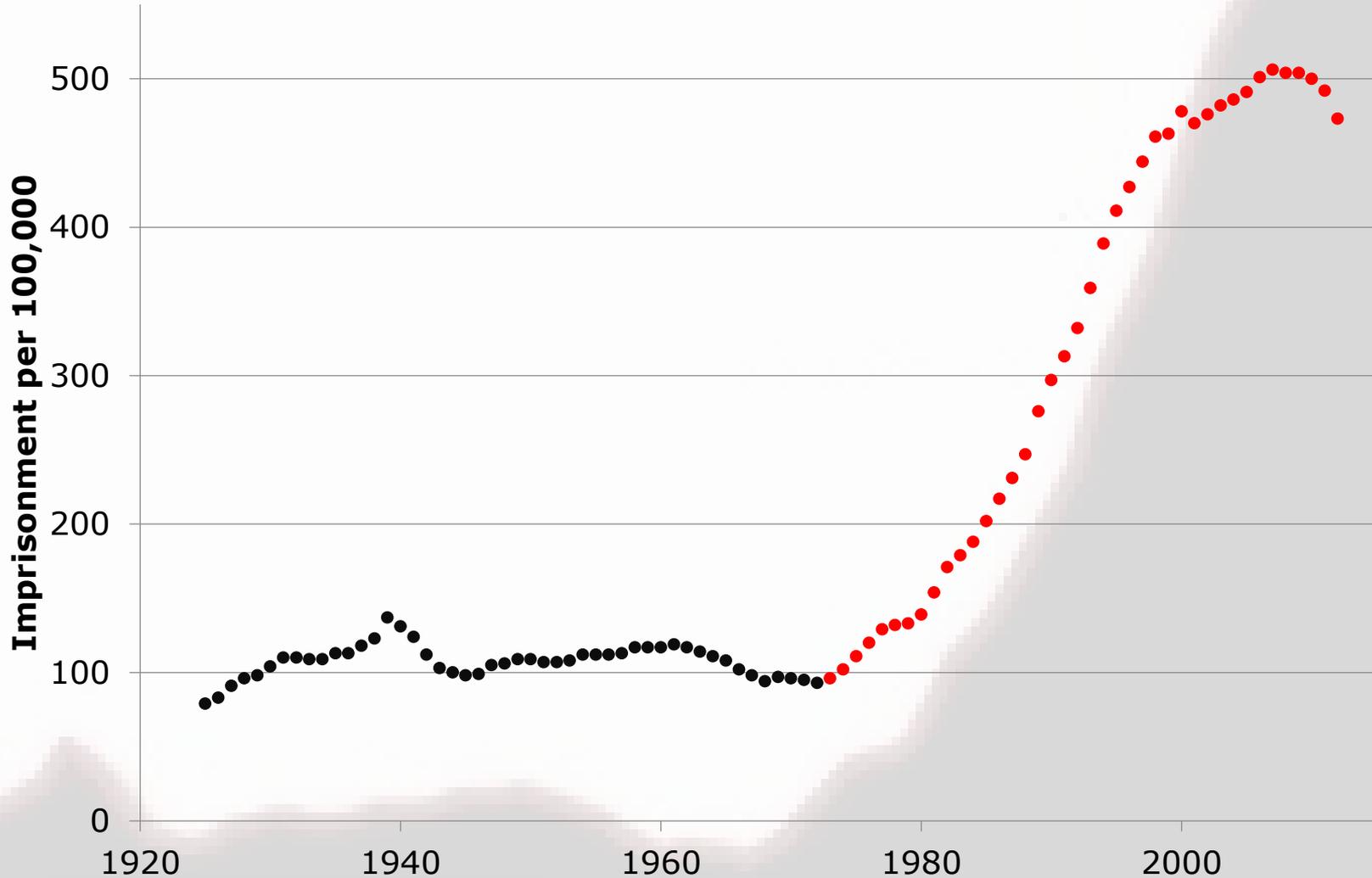
- What changes in U.S. society and public policy drove the rise in incarceration?
- What consequences have these changes had for crime rates?
- What effects does incarceration have on those in confinement; on their families and children; on the neighborhoods and communities from which they come and to which they return; and on the economy, politics, structure, and culture of U.S. society?
- What are the implications for public policy of the evidence on causes and effects of high levels of incarceration?

U.S. Incarceration Rate, 1925-1972



Note: Incarceration rate is state and federal prison population per 100,000

U.S. Incarceration Rate, 1925-2012

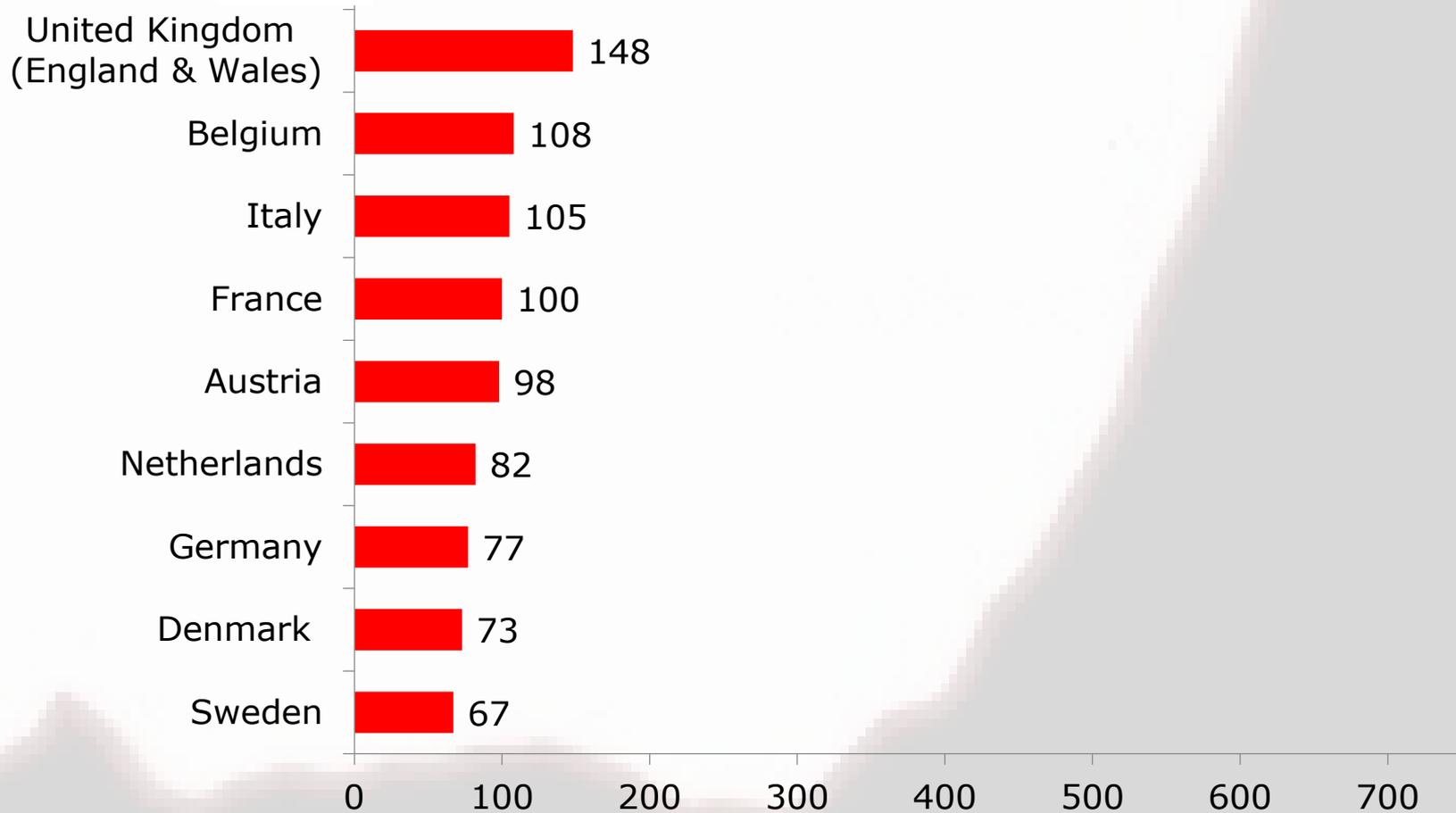


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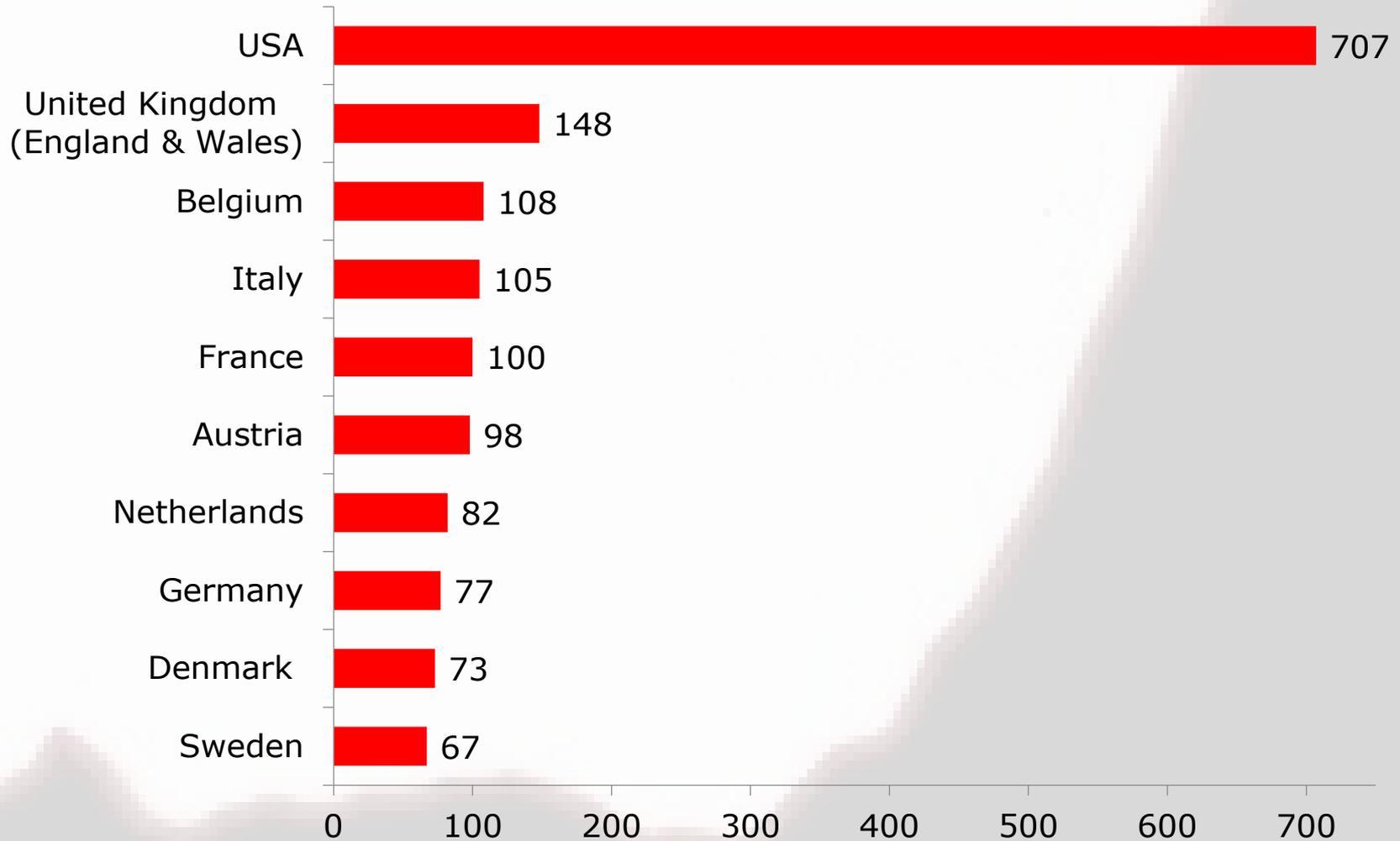
Advisers to the Nation on Science, Engineering, and Medicine

Note: Incarceration rate is state and federal prison population per 100,000

Incarceration in U.S. and Europe, 2012-2013 per 100,000 population



Incarceration in U.S. and Europe, 2012-2013 per 100,000 population



Our First Conclusion

The growth in incarceration rates in the United States over the past 40 years is historically unprecedented and internationally unique

Underlying Causes: Crime, Politics, and Social Change

- Crime rates increased significantly from the early 1960s to the early 1980s (e.g., murder rate doubled from 1960 to 1980)
- Decline in urban manufacturing, problems of drugs and violence concentrated in poor and racially segregated inner city neighborhoods
- Rising crime combined with civil rights activism, urban disorder, heightened public concern and tough-on-crime rhetoric from political leaders

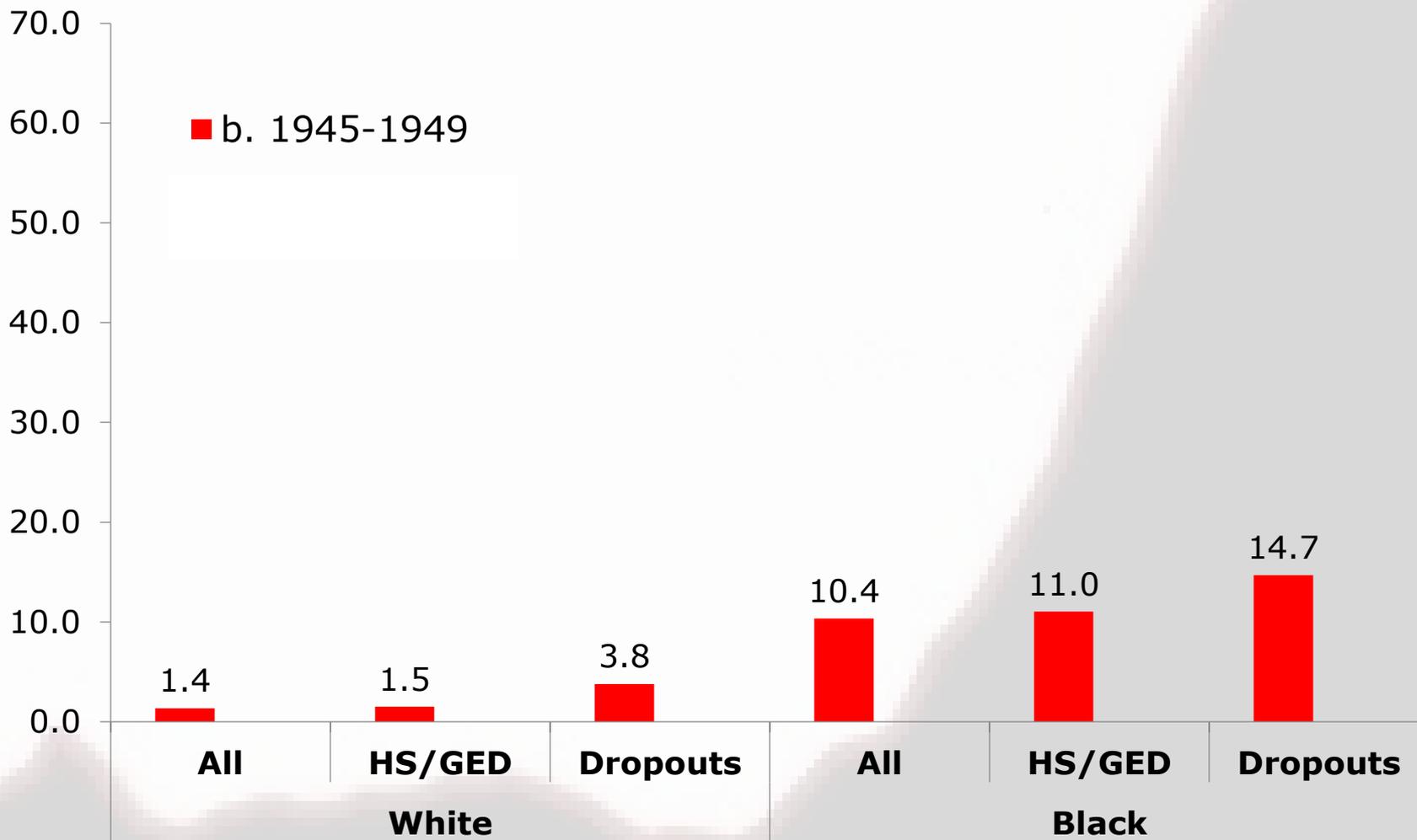
Direct Causes: Changes in Sentencing and Law Enforcement

- In the 1980s states and the federal government adopted mandatory guidelines and expanded mandatory prison sentences
- Drug arrest rates increased significantly and drug crimes were sentenced more harshly
- In the 1990s longer sentences were set particularly for violent crimes and repeat offenders (e.g., three-strikes, truth-in-sentencing)

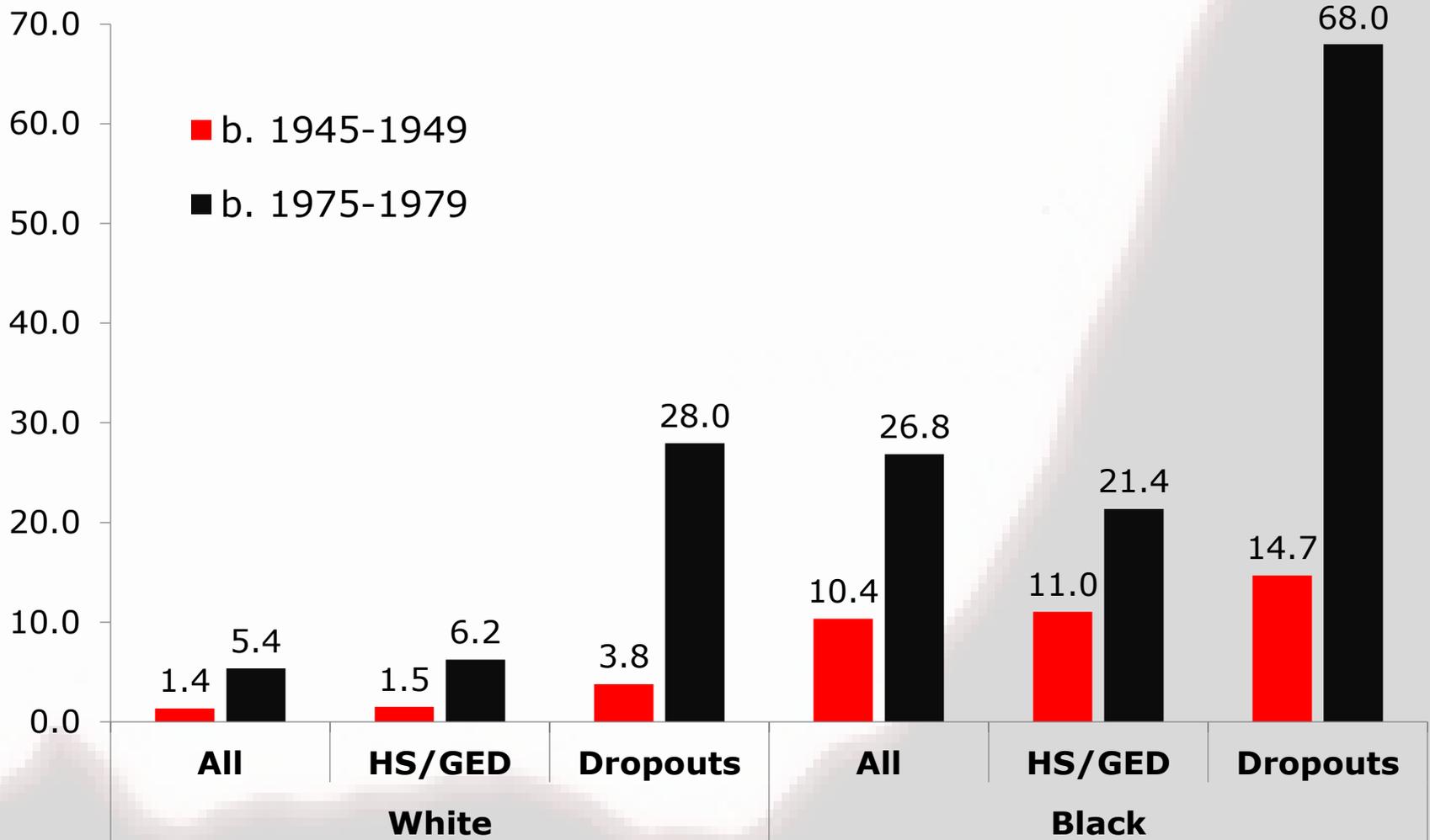
Tough Sentencing Increased Incarceration and Contributed to Racial Disparity

- Growth of state prison populations, 1980 – 2010, is explained in roughly equal proportion by (a) the increased rate of incarceration given an arrest and (b) longer sentences
- Although incarceration rates increased across the population, racial disparities yielded high rates among Hispanics and extremely high rates among blacks

Men's Risk of Imprisonment by Age 30-34



Imprisonment Risk Extraordinary for Young Less Educated Black Men



Impact of Incarceration on Crime

- Increased incarceration may have reduced crime but most studies indicate the effect is likely to be small
- Either through incapacitation or deterrence, the incremental crime reduction effect of increasing lengthy sentences is modest at best

Social and Economic Effects

- Prisons became more overcrowded and offered fewer programs, but lethal violence in prison declined
- Men and women released from prison experience low wages and high unemployment
- Incarceration is associated with the instability of families and adverse developmental outcomes for the children involved
- Incarceration is concentrated in poor, high-crime neighborhoods

Main Conclusion

The U.S. has gone past the point where the numbers of people in prison can be justified by any potential benefits.

According to the best available evidence:

- The crime reduction effect is uncertain; most studies show small effects
- The social and economic consequences may have been far-reaching

From Evidence to Policy: Guiding Principles

To draw implications from the empirical research we elaborate four principles of jurisprudence and good governance:

- Sentences should be proportionate to the seriousness of the crime
- Punishment should not exceed the minimum needed to achieve its legitimate purpose
- The conditions and consequences of imprisonment should not be so severe or lasting as to violate one's fundamental status as a member of society
- As public institutions in a democracy, prisons should promote the general well-being of all members of society

Policy Recommendation

The United States should take steps to reduce incarceration rates

This requires changes in:

- Sentencing Policy: Reexamining policies for mandatory minimum sentences, long sentences and enforcement of drug laws
- Prison Policy: Improving the conditions of incarceration, reducing the harm to the families and communities
- Social Policy: Assessing community needs for housing, treatment, and employment that may increase with declining incarceration

**For more
information:
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