

FACT SHEET ON U.S. PRISON SYSTEM (revised Spring 2003)
(research by Ali Budner)

Growth of the Prison System

1. Expansion of Prison Population across the U.S.:

-Total number of incarcerated individuals across recent decades:ⁱ

1969- 150,000

1980- 501,886

1990- 1,000,000

2001- 2,100,146

-Current number of people in the correctional population (prison, jail, probation, parole, etc.): 6.6 millionⁱⁱ

- In 2001, the rate of incarceration was 709 per 100,000 residents – higher than any other nation in the world.ⁱⁱⁱ

2. Spending on incarceration:

-\$45 billion in 2001—compared to \$7 billion in 1980^{iv}

-351 new facilities built in the 1990s

-State bond expenditures for incarceration exceed that for higher education
California spends \$5.6 billion on incarceration and only \$4.3 billion for higher education.^v

-Since 1980:^{vi}

Spending on incarceration rose 571% compared to 33% for k-12 education.

The number of guards increased 250% while the number of k-12 teachers decreased 8%.

The prison population increased 400% while the number of graduating seniors dropped 2.7%.

-The government and private security companies now spend almost as much money on crime control each year as the Pentagon spends on national defense.

3. Prison expansion, public policy, and public perception:

During the time between 1980 and the present, crime rates have not increased. The explosion of incarceration is due to policy changes, influenced by the corporate-controlled dominant media, “tough on crime” politicians, and other interested powers (prison guards, police forces, penologists, etc.).

Mass media:

-Coverage of crime on the three major networks tripled from 571 stories in 1991 to 1,632 stories in 1993 despite the fact that crime declined slightly over that period.^{vii}

-Three quarters (76%) of the public say they form their opinions about crime from what they see or read in the news, more than three times the number who state they get their primary information on crime from personal experience (22%). But are the news media presenting an accurate picture of youth and crime? Although youth homicides declined by 68% between 1993 and 1999 and are at their lowest rate since 1966, 62% of the public believes that youth crime is on the rise.^{viii}

-Violent crime dominates crime coverage. Although homicides made up one to two-tenths of one percent of all arrests, homicides made up more than a quarter (27%-29%) of all the crimes on the evening news.^{ix}

-Crime coverage has increased while real crime rates have fallen. While homicide coverage was increasing on the network news by 473% from 1990 to 1998 homicide arrests dropped 32.9% from 1990 to 1998.^x

Influence of politicians, prison guards, police officers, penologists:

-Congress has passed a crime bill every 2 years (every election year) since 1986.^{xi}

-In 1998, the California Correctional Peace Officers Association (CCPOA) gave over \$2 million to governor Gray Davis, \$763,000 to the media, and over \$100,000 to Proposition 184, the 3 Strikes Law.^{xii}

The War on Drugs:

-The War on Drugs has resulted in the arrest, prosecution and incarceration of tens of thousands of persons each year for crimes associated with the possession and use of illegal drugs.^{xiii}

-1 in 4 jail inmates in 1996 was in jail for a drug offense, compared to 1 in 10 in 1983; drug offenders constituted 21% of 1999 federal prison inmates.^{xiv}

-In 2000, prisoners sentenced for drug offenses constitute the largest group of Federal inmates (61%) in 1999, up from 53% in 1990.^{xv}

-Nearly half a million people are behind bars on drugs charges – more than all of Western Europe (with a bigger population) incarcerates for all offenses.^{xvi}

4. The Private Prison Industry (“Prison Industrial Complex”)

-The claimed benefits of prison privatization have not been proven.
“Private prisons—prisons on the cheap—have been characterized by staff shortages and inadequate programs for prisoners. Riots, escapes, and violence are commonplace. Prisoners and a guard have been murdered; guards have been indicted for sexual and physical abuse of prisoners; and contracts have been terminated for poor performance. Also at issue is whether such a core function within the criminal justice system should be handed over to corporations, whose shareholders’ interests come before the general public’s, and whether corporations should be allowed to develop a long-term vested interest in shaping criminal justice policy.^{xvii}

-Private adult correctional facility management firms as of 2001:^{xviii}

-14 in total

-The 3 biggest: Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), Wackenhut Corrections Corporation, Management and Training Corporation

-Total number of private corrections facilities in 32 U.S. states and Puerto Rico = 151 (Texas=42, California=22) with total capacity of 118,976 people

-In 2001, 91,828 inmates (5.8% of all state and 12.3% of all federal prisoners) were held in privately operated prisons.^{xix}

-A few of the companies that profit from exploitation of prison labor:
TWA, McDonald’s, Compaq, Texas Instruments, Dell, Kaiser Steel, Sprint, Microsoft, Victoria’s Secret, Pierre Cardin, MCI, IBM, Motorola, Toys R Us, AT&T, Revlon, Eddie Bauer, Lexus, Boeing, Honeywell, Nordstrom, Jostens...^{xx}

Race, Prisons, and the Criminal Justice System

1. Populations of racial groups in prisons:

-Incarceration rates in the U.S. (per 100,000) for racial groups:^{xxi}

African Americans	1815
Native Americans	709
Latinos	609
Whites	235
Asians	99

-Percentages of racial groups in California:^{xxii}

% of CA pop.	% of CA prison pop
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Black	6.8	31.6
Latino	25.1	33.9
White	55.6	29.6
Native Amer.	3.5	
Asian	8.9	4.9 (combined)

2. African American men in prison:

-29% of African American men will serve time in prison
(Compared to 16% of Hispanic males and 4% of White males)^{xxiii}

-At yearend 2001 10% of the African American male population between ages 25-29 was in prison (Compared to 2.9% of Hispanic males and 1.2% of White males).^{xxiv}

-The rate of imprisonment of Black males in the United States today is higher than in South Africa at the height of Apartheid.^{xxv}

3. Portrayal in the media:

-Youth of color fare far worse than their white counterparts in the media's association of youth and violence. A study of Time and Newsweek stories found that the term "young black males" became synonymous with the word "criminal" in coverage. A study on TV news showed that white youth were more likely to be featured in stories on health or education than black youth.^{xxvi}

-African Americans are underrepresented in reporting as victims, and over represented in the news as perpetrators. Articles about White homicide victims tend to be longer, and more frequent than the articles that cover African American victims.^{xxvii}

4. Disparate enforcement of drug laws:

-Five times as many whites use drugs as blacks. Yet blacks comprise the great majority of drug offenders sent to prison.^{xxviii}

-African Americans represent 13% of drug users, 38% of arrestees for drug use, and 59% of those convicted for drug use.

-Latinos represent 10% of drug users, but 22.5% of sentenced drug offenders.

In 2000, increasing number of drug offenses accounted for 27% of the total growth among black inmates, 15% among Hispanic, 14% among white.^{xxix}

-In California and New York prisons, two thirds of drug treatment spots went to white prisoners.

-Possession and Distribution of Crack Cocaine (a drug used primarily by minorities) carries much stiffer penalties than similar offenses involving the powder version of the drug (used more by affluent Whites).^{xxx}

5. Capital Punishment:

-African Americans who kill whites are 19 times more likely to be executed than whites who kill African Americans.

-African Americans are 4 times more likely to receive death penalty for capital offenses than whites.

-55 percent of inmates on death row are African American.

-Of people currently on death row, 82% were convicted in cases involving white victims. Of those sentenced to death for crimes committed as juveniles, two-thirds are people of color.^{xxxii}

Women in Prison

1. Growing population:

-From 1990-2000, the number of female prisoners has increased 108% (more than doubled) while the number of male prisoners has grown 77%.^{xxxiii}

-At the end of 2001, 93,031 women were in state or federal prisons—6.6% of all prison inmates.^{xxxiii}

2. Drugs and domestic abuse:

-In 2000, drug offenders accounted for the largest source of the total growth among female inmates (35%).^{xxxiv}

-Almost half of the women on death row have a history of abuse and are there for the murder of an abusive spouse or lover, most often in defense of their lives and the lives of their children.^{xxxv}

3. Inmates with children:

-80% of imprisoned women have children and of those women, 70% are single mothers.^{xxxvi}

-In 1999, 721,400 of the prisoners in Federal and State prisons were parents of a total of 1,498,800 children.^{xxxvii}

Prison Conditions

1. Human rights abuses:

-Conditions in US prisons have been repeatedly condemned by groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch for violating the United Nations *Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners*.^{xxviii}

-In “Supermax” (short for supermaximum security) facilities, prisoners are typically confined to isolation cells for 23 hours or more a day, with no work or vocational programs. 38 states have built prisons in recent years and many prisoners who do not merit a high security rating have been moved there.

- Male prisoners spend an average 15 hours a day in their cell with one-and-a-half hours outside. Women prisoners spend an average 17 hours a day in their cell with 1 hour outside for exercise.^{xxxix}

-Almost 25% of all inmates are victims of sexual assault each year during incarceration.

2. Working conditions:

-The actual wage of a California prisoner is a high \$1.15 an hour... Many prisoners make under \$.20 per hour, and some don't get paid at all.^{xl}

-“The conditions for working prisoners are among the worst in the industrialized world. There are no benefits, no vacation, no decent health care, no safety standards, and prisoners are not allowed to form a union. Severe repression and longer sentences result from a refusal to work. Prisoners are beaten, put in solitary confinement, or both. There is no oversight of prison labor conditions, and no accountability, so prison officials have no incentive to provide safe working conditions or treat prisoners humanely.”^{xli}

3. Health care:

-Healthcare for prisoners is practically nonexistent. It is common practice for prisoners to be denied medical examinations and treatments.^{xlii}

-Of the 3,191 deaths in prisons in 1999, 258 were from AIDS. In that year it was estimated that 25,727 inmates were infected with HIV/AIDS.

-Often prisoners do not learn that they are infected with a fatal disease (such as Hepatitis C) until long (sometimes years) after they have been diagnosed.

-A survey conducted in 38 states revealed that 58% of the prisons or jails serve - exactly the same diet to pregnant prisoners as to others and in most cases do not meet the minimum recommended allowances for pregnancy.”

4. Recidivism:

-Among the nearly 300,000 prisoners released in 15 states in 1994, 67.5% were arrested within 3 years. A study of 1983 releases estimated 62.5%.^{xliii}

-The recidivism rate for all ex-prisoners three years after release is 63%; for ex-prisoners suffering from serious mental disorders it is over 80%.^{xliv}

-50% of prisoners who did not receive visits from family members were re-arrested in the year following release and 12% were re-imprisoned. 70% of prisoners who were visited regularly by at least three people while serving their term were free of arrests during their first post-release year, and only two were re-imprisoned.^{xlv}

-Many sanctions banning ex-prisoners from various opportunities were passed in the 1990s in order to “get tough on crime.” The penalties include a lifetime ban on living in public housing, receiving welfare or food stamps (for those convicted of drug felonies), prohibitions against getting certain jobs in plumbing, education, and other fields, and the loss of the right to vote, for life in some states. Felons with drug convictions are barred from receiving federal student loans, and women who serve more than 15 months in prison may be forced to give up their children to foster care.^{xlvi}

-In recent years the states have also passed legislation lengthening the list of jobs that bar people with a criminal conviction. In New York, there are more than 100 prohibited job categories, including plumbing, real estate, barbering, education, health care and private security. In Pennsylvania, the Legislature in 1997 passed a sweeping law that prohibits people convicted of a long list of crimes, including the theft of two library books, from working in nursing homes or home health care for the elderly.^{xlvii}

5. Disenfranchisement:

-Prisoners have little real political representation and, in all but two states, Maine and Vermont, cannot vote.^{xlviii}

-At least 12 states permanently disenfranchise ex-felons. In these states, even citizens who have served their prison terms, completed parole, paid any fines, and been reincorporated into their communities are barred from voting—for life.^{xlix}

-About 4 million people in the United States, including 1.4 million Black men (13 percent of the adult male Black population) have currently or permanently lost

their right to vote as a result of a felony conviction, according to Sentencing Project data.^l

-The U.S. is the only democracy in the world that takes the vote away from ex-offenders who have served their sentences. Many countries also allow prisoners to vote.^{li}

Capital Punishment

-Many US prisoners have gone to their deaths despite serious doubts over their guilt.^{lii}

-38 of the 50 US states plus the U.S. federal government and military provide for the death penalty in law.^{liii}

-Over 3,700 prisoners were under sentence of death as of January 1, 2002.^{liv}

-66 prisoners were executed in the USA in 2001, bringing to 749 the total number executed since the use of the death penalty was resumed in 1977.^{lv}

-In 2000, the total number of inmates on death row was 3,593 (White-1,990; Black-1,535; other-68).^{lvi}

Resources for further research and activism (sources, links, etc)

Internet links:

www.prisonactivist.org
www.prisonsucks.com
www.sentencingproject.org
www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs
www.nomoreprisons.net
www.amnesty.org
www.albany.edu/sourcebook/
www.drugwarfacts.org
www.criticalresistance.org
www.lindesmith.org

Books:

Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis

Christian Parenti

States of Confinement: Policing, Detention, and Prisons

Joy James, ed.

The Celling of America: An Inside Look at the U.S. Prison Industry

Daniel Burton-Rose, ed.

Search and Destroy

Jerome Miller

Criminal Injustice

Elihu Rosenblatt, ed.

Social Justice

PARC publication (?)

The American Prison System

Peter G. Herman, ed.

Race to Incarcerate

Mark Mauer

NOTES:

ⁱ Bureau of Justice Statistics (www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/)

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Ibid.

^v www.prisonactivist.org

^{vi} Prison Activist Resource Center fact-sheet

^{vii} www.buildingblocksforyouth.org

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} Ibid.

^x Ibid.

^{xi} Cannon, Carl M. "America: All Locked Up" (article from *The American Prison System* by Peter Herman) p. 70

^{xii} PARC fact-sheet

^{xiii} www.lindesmith.org

^{xiv} www.sentencingproject.org

^{xv} www.drugwarfacts.org

^{xvi} Ibid.

^{xvii} Stephen, Nathan. "The Prison Industry Goes Global." (article from Yes Magazine- Fall 2000)

^{xviii} Bureau of Justice Statistics

^{xix} Ibid.

^{xx} PARC fact-sheet

^{xxi} Bureau of Justice Statistics

^{xxii} www.prisonactivist.org

^{xxiii} www.sentencingproject.org

^{xxiv} Bureau of Justice Statistics

^{xxv} www.prisonsucks.com

^{xxvi} www.buildingblocksforyouth.org

^{xxvii} Ibid.

^{xxviii} www.drugwarfacts.org

^{xxix} Ibid.

^{xxx} Crack and powder cocaine have the same active ingredient, but crack is marketed in less expensive quantities and in lower income communities of color. A five-year federal mandatory minimum sentence for crack cocaine is triggered by selling only five grams, while an offender must sell 500 grams of powder cocaine to get the same sentence. In 1986, before the enactment of federal mandatory minimum sentencing for crack cocaine offenses, the average federal drug sentence for African Americans was 11 percent higher than for whites. Four years later, the average federal drug sentence for African Americans was 49 percent higher.

^{xxxii} www.aclu.org/death-penalty/toolkit_pt4.html

^{xxxiii} Bureau of Justice Statistics

^{xxxiii} Ibid.

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- xxxiv www.drugwarfacts.org
- xxxv PARC fact-sheet
- xxxvi Ibid.
- xxxvii Bureau of Justice Statistics
- xxxviii Ibid.
- xxxix Ibid.
- xl Ibid.
- xli Ibid.
- xlii PARC fact-sheet
- xliii Bureau of Justice Statistics
- xliv Kupers, Terry. *Prison Madness*. Jossey-Bass Publishers. San Francisco. 1999. (p.87)
- xlvi Ibid. (p.158)
- xlvi Butterfield, Fox. "Freed From Prison, Still Paying a Penalty." *New York Times*. December 29, 2002.
- xlvi Ibid.
- xlvi Dowdy, Zachary R. "Crime and Punishment: How the U.S. Prison System Makes Minority Communities Pay." (article from *Crisis* magazine) p.35
- xlvi www.demos-usa.org
- l "Crime and Punishment" p.36
- li www.demos-usa.org
- lii www.amnesty.org
- liii Ibid.
- liv Ibid.
- lv Ibid.
- lvi Bureau of Justice Statistics