

Racism and Incarceration: African-Americans in US Jails

Blacks Possess Drugs Less Frequently Than Whites, But Are Put In Prison Much More Frequently – And For Much Longer – Than Whites

By [Washington's Blog](#)

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There Are More African Americans Under Correctional Control Today Than In 1850 Slave-holding America ...

More Are In Jail Than In Apartheid South Africa ...

And More Are Disenfranchised Than The Year The Constitutional Amendment Giving Blacks the Right To Vote Was Ratified

The United States has the [highest incarceration rate in the world](#) ... higher than Russia, China, Saudi Arabia, North Korea or Iran.

While the United States represents about 5 percent of the world's population, it houses around [25 percent of the world's prisoners](#).

But all people aren't treated equally .. African-Americans are treated especially poorly.

Michelle Alexander – a law school professor who directed Stanford Law School's Civil Rights Clinic and served as law clerk for Justice Harry Blackmun at the U. S. Supreme Court – [notes](#):

- The United States incarcerates a higher percentage of black men than South Africa did at the height of apartheid
- Primarily because of these significant incarceration rates, the level of black youth poverty is higher today than it was in 1968
- An African-American male is sentenced an average of a 20 to 50 times longer prison term than a white male convicted of the same drug crime.
- Over 2.3 million men in America are in prison — about half for drug crimes. Seventy percent of all men imprisoned are black or Hispanic. Thirty years ago, before the "War on Drugs" was implemented, there were only 300,000 people in the American prison system.
- There are 2.7 million children whose fathers or mothers are in prison, on probation, or on parole.
- There are 7 million Americans either in prison, on probation, or on parole —

mostly for selling or using drugs. In many inner cities, eighty percent of young men have prison records. These convictions will remain on their records permanently, limiting their voting rights and their ability to find employment. Currently, in all but two states, citizens with felony convictions are permanently or temporarily prohibited from voting. The United States is the only country that permits permanent disenfranchisement of felons even after completion of their sentences.

[Indeed:](#)

- Since 1971, there have been more than 40 million arrests for drug-related offenses.
- Even though blacks and whites have similar levels of drug use, blacks are ten times as likely to be incarcerated for drug crimes.
- “There are more blacks under correctional control today — in prison or jail, on probation or parole — than were enslaved in 1850, a decade before the Civil War began.”
- “As of 2004, more African American men were disenfranchised (due to felon disenfranchisement laws) than in 1870, the year the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified prohibiting laws that explicitly deny the right to vote on the basis of race.”
- In 2005, 4 out of 5 drug arrests were for possession not trafficking, and 80% of the increase in drug arrests in the 1990s was for marijuana.
- There are [50,000 arrests](#) for low-level pot possession a year in New York City, representing one out of every seven cases that turn up in criminal courts. Most of these arrested are black and hispanic men.

A report released last year by the National Research Council – an arm of the National Academy of Sciences – [found](#):

The U.S. prison population is largely drawn from the most disadvantaged part of the nation’s population: mostly men under age 40, disproportionately minority, and poorly educated.

Prisons are part of a poverty trap, with many paths leading in, but few leading out.

Today, a new study published by Robynn J.A. Cox – assistant professor of economics at Spelman College – [finds](#):

The United States has a dual criminal justice system that has helped to maintain the economic and social hierarchy in America, based on the subjugation of blacks, within the United States. Public policy, criminal justice actors, society and the media, and criminal behavior have all played roles in creating what sociologist Loic Wacquant calls the hyperincarceration of black men.

Although the right for blacks to vote has been enforced since the Voting Rights Act of 1965, mass incarceration policies have effectively taken this entitlement away from numerous African Americans.

Chart's from Cox's study tell the tale:

Postscript: The prison-industrial complex is part of the problem. Indeed, private prison corporations obtain quotas from the government, where the government *guarantees* [a certain number](#) of prisoners at any given time.

And some [really big corporations](#) use prisoners to provide cheap labor. Indeed, some call it a [new form of slavery](#). (As if we didn't have enough of the [traditional kind](#))

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