

Drug Policy and Prisoners: The Facts

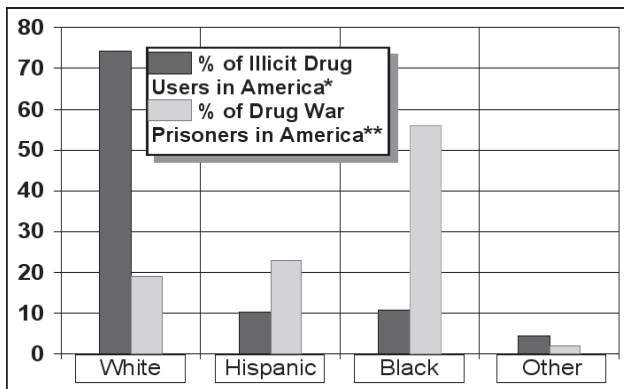
The United States operates the largest prison system in the world. The overall U.S. incarceration rate is eight times that of similar democracies.¹

In 1985, our incarceration rate was 313 per 100,000 population. As of June 30, 2003 it was 715 per 100,000. The largest single factor contributing to this imprisonment wave is a ten-fold rise in drug convictions. In 1980, when illicit drug use was peaking, there were about 50,000 men and women in prison for violating drug laws. In 2002, there were about 500,000 incarcerated.²

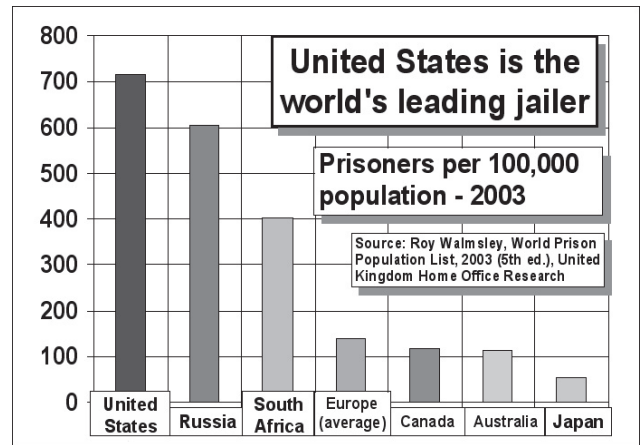
In 1969, \$65 million was spent by the Nixon administration on the drug war; in 1982 the Reagan administration spent \$1.65 billion; in 1999 the Clinton administration spent \$17.7 billion³, and in 2003, the Bush Administration spent \$19.2 billion.⁴

In 2002 the growth in the number of inmates under State or Federal jurisdiction (2.6%) was more than twice the percentage increase recorded during 2001 (1.1%). The population under the jurisdiction of State and Federal authorities increased by 36,623 inmates during 2002, higher than the increase in 2001 (up 15,521). The prison population has grown an average of 45,000 inmates per year (3.6%) since year-end 1995.⁵

While most Americans believe that more Blacks are in prison on drug charges because more Blacks use drugs, this is not true. White drug users outnumber Black drug users by 7 to 1, but Black drug war prisoners outnumber White drug war prisoners almost 3 to 1.



*Source: SAMHSA National Household Survey on Drug Abuse ** Source: The Sentencing Project



State governments spent \$32.5 billion on Corrections in 1997 alone. To compare, states only spent \$22.2 billion on assistance to the poor.⁶

According to the US Justice Department, between 1995 and 2001: "the number of Federal inmates held for public-order offenses increased 133%, mostly accounted for by immigration offenses [in the wake of 9/11]. While the number of offenders in each major offense category increased, the number incarcerated for a drug offense accounted for the largest percentage of the total growth (48%), followed by public-order offenders (38%)."⁷

Since the enactment of mandatory minimum sentencing for drug users, the Federal Bureau of Prisons budget has increased by 1,954%. Its budget has jumped from \$220 million in 1986 to more than \$4.3 billion in 2001.⁸

Assuming incarceration rates remain unchanged, an estimated 1 in 15 Americans born in 2001 (6.6%) can be expected to serve time in prison during their lifetime. For African-American men, that number is about 1 in 3 (32.2%).⁹

For women, the chances of imprisonment were 6 times greater in 2001 (1.8%) than in 1974 (0.3%).⁹

"We must have law enforcement authorities address the issue because if we do not, prevention, education, and treatment messages will not work very well. But having said that, I also believe that we have created an American gulag." - Gen. Barry R. McCaffrey, former U.S. "Drug Czar".¹⁰

Footnotes:

- Currie, E., Crime and Punishment in America (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1998), pp. 3 & 61
- Bureau of Justice Statistics: Bulletin NCJ 203947- Prison/Jail Inmates, Midyear 2003 & The Sentencing Project: Facts About Prisons and Prisoners [Briefing/Factsheet #1035] after USDOJ, Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- U.S. Congress, Hearings on Federal Drug Enforcement before the Senate Committee on Investigations, 1975 and 1976 (1976); Office of National Drug Control Policy, National Drug Control Strategy, 1992: Budget Summary (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1992), p. 214; Office of National Drug Control Policy, National Drug Control Strategy 2000 Annual Report (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 2000), p. 94, Tbl 4-1.
- Bureau of Justice Statistics: ONDCP, FY 2003 National Drug Control Budget, February 2002.
- Harrison, Paige M. & Allen J. Beck, PhD, US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Prisoners in 2002 (Washington DC: US Department of Justice, July 2003), p.2.
- National Association of State Budget Officers (NASBO), 1999 State Expenditure Report (Washington, DC: NASBO, June 2000), pp. 38, 68.
- Harrison, Paige M. & Allen J. Beck, PhD, US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Prisoners in 2002 (Washington DC: US Department of Justice, July 2003), p.11.
- US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics 1996 (Washington DC: US Dept. of Justice, 1997), p.20; Executive Office of the President, Budget of the United States Government, FY 2002 (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 2001), p.134.
- Bonczar, T. P., US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin NCJ 197976, "Prevalence of Imprisonment in the U.S. Population, 1974-2001 (August 2003), p.1.
- Gen. Barry R. McCaffrey (USA, Ret.), Director, ONDCP (Office of National Drug Control Policy), Keynote Address, Opening Plenary Session, National Conference on Drug Abuse Prevention Research, National Institute on Drug Abuse, September 19, 1996, Washington, DC, on the web at <http://165.112.78.61/MeetSum/CODA/Keynote2.html>

Get the Facts! www.drugwarfacts.org

We depend on donations from people like you, please join today!

Annual dues are \$30 (\$15 students, \$6 prisoners)

November Coalition
282 West Astor • Colville, WA 99114
 Ph/Fx: (509) 684-1550 • moreinfo@november.org • www.november.org

Working to end drug war injustice

The November Coalition is a 501 (c) (3) organization. Your gift or donation is tax deductible.

The November Coalition

