

Incarceration is not an equal opportunity punishment.

On June 30, 2004 there were 2,131,180 people in U.S. prisons and jails. That's a rise of 2.3% during the 12 previous months. Federal prisons are growing almost 5 times faster than state prison populations.

As of June 30, 2004, the U.S. incarceration rate was 726 per 100,000 residents. But when you break down the statistics you see that incarceration is not an equal opportunity punishment.

Select U.S. incarceration rates:

Whites: 393 per 100,000

Latinos: 957 per 100,000

Blacks: 2,531 per 100,000

Gender is an important "filter" on the who goes to prison:

All Females: 123 per 100,000

All Males: 1,348 per 100,000

White males: 717 per 100,000

Latino males: 1,717 per 100,000

Black males: 4,919 per 100,000

Break it down by age and race, and you can see what is going on even clearer:

For Black males ages 25-29: 12,603 per 100,000. (That's 12.6% of Black men in their late 20s!)

Or you can make some international comparisons:

South Africa under apartheid was internationally condemned as a racist society.

South Africa under apartheid (1993), Black males: 851 per 100,000

U.S. under George Bush (2003), Black males: 4,919 per 100,000

What does it mean that the leader of the "free world" locks up its Black males at a rate 5.8 times higher than the most openly racist country in the world?

Statistics as of June 30, 2004 from Bureau of Justice Statistics Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2004, Tables 1, 13 and 14, and Census Bureau population estimates for 2004. South Africa figures from Marc Mauer, Americans Behind Bars: The International Use of Incarceration. All references to Blacks and Whites are for what the Bureau of Justice Statistics and U.S. Census refer to as "non-Hispanic Blacks" and "non-Hispanic Whites".

Last edit: 6/28/2005