

**If you are a black male, you have a 1 in 4 chance of ending up behind bars.**

**If you are Latino, 1 in 6.**

**If you are a white male, you have a 1 in 23 chance of serving time.**

Why does the color of your skin load the game of life so heavily against you? Part of the explanation can be attributed to racial disparities in socioeconomic wealth. But the racial disparities of our prison population cannot be fully explained simply by differences in socioeconomic status. This gap can only fully be accounted for by racial prejudices in policy-making, enforcement, and sentencing in our criminal justice system.



These biases are well-defined in the realm of drug offense, which has accounted for nearly all of the 400% growth in the U.S. prison population growth since 1980. Before the 1986 mandatory minimums for crack possession, drug sentencing for blacks was 11% higher than for whites. Four years later, it was 49% higher. According to the federal Household Survey, "most current illicit drug users are white. There were an estimated 9.9 million whites, 2 million blacks, and 1.4 million Hispanics who were current illicit drug users in 1998." Yet blacks make up 36.8% of those arrested for drug violations, over 42% of those in federal prison for drug violations, and almost 60% of those in state prisons for drug felonies!

- \* Among persons convicted of drug felonies in state courts, whites were less likely than African-Americans to be sent to prison. 32% of convicted white defendants received a prison sentence, while 46% of African-American defendants received prison sentences.
- \* The United States incarcerates African-American men at a rate that is approximately four times the rate of incarceration of black men in South Africa.
- \* 1.5 million black men out of a total voting population of 10.4 million have lost their right to vote due to felony convictions.
- \* One in three black men between the ages of 20 and 29 years old is under correctional supervision or control.
- \* About 83% of the victims of those executed since 1976 were white, although only 50% of murder victims are white.