

Summary of Dane County imprisonment/arrest patterns (with emphasis on younger offenders)
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Although Madison and Dane County overall have low crime and imprisonment rates, the small African-American population in the community has extremely high rates of arrest and imprisonment. Dane County's population is only about 4% African American, but there are actually more African Americans sent to prison from Dane County than whites (in 1999, 346 blacks versus 240 non-Hispanic whites and 15 "others." Imprisonment and arrest rates are generally calculated by dividing the number imprisoned or arrested from a given racial group by the appropriate population size for that racial group and then multiplying the quotient by 100,000. In recent years, the rate of new prison admissions from Dane County has been about forty times higher for African Americans than for non-Hispanic whites. In 1998-9, for example, the total new imprisonment rate for African Americans was an estimated 2278 per 100,000 (equivalent to about 2.3%), while it was 57 per 100,000 for whites. This figure includes both sexes and adults of all ages. Focusing only on men aged 20-29, in 1999 the new imprisonment rate for African Americans was 7246 (equivalent to 7.2%) compared with 199 for whites, a ratio of 36 to 1. Among women aged 20-29, the African American imprisonment rate was 1261 compared to 30 for whites, giving a 42 to 1 ratio.

Compared to whites, African Americans imprisoned in Dane County are especially likely to be young. Considering only those entering prison on new sentences with no prior felony conviction, 37% of blacks versus 25% of whites are teenagers under twenty; 42% of blacks versus 34% of whites are in their twenties. By contrast, only 21% of blacks versus 41% of whites entering prison on a new sentence with no prior felony are thirty or over. Considering all those entering prison with no prior felony conviction (including probation/parole violators as well as those newly sentenced to prison), 68% of African Americans are in their teens or twenties, compared with 54% of whites. The prison admission rates of the youngest adults, aged 18 and 19 appears especially high, estimated at 9700 (9.7%) for African Americans and 302 for whites.

African Americans have much higher imprisonment rates than whites across all offense groups, but have been disproportionately affected by the "drug war." About 40% of African Americans sent to prison from Dane County on new sentences 1997-9 are drug offenders, the overwhelming majority of whom are sentenced on "intent to deliver" charges, compared with only 13% of whites. Among African Americans under 30 given new prison sentences from Dane County, 51% are drug offenders; about 18% were convicted of robbery or burglary, about 12% assault, and only 4% homicide or sexual assault. By contrast, among non-Hispanic whites under 30 with new prison sentences, only 15% are for drug convictions; 18% were convicted of homicide or sexual assault, 31% of robbery or burglary, 13% were convicted of assault, and 14% theft/fraud. Among African Americans under 30 entering prison on a probation or parole violation (with or without a new sentence), 33% are drug offenders, 15% have been convicted of non-violent theft or fraud, 18% have been convicted of assault, and about 14% have been sentenced for robbery or burglary.

Arrest patterns precede imprisonment patterns. A disproportionate share of arrests in Dane County are of African American youth, and these disparities are even higher than those found in other locales. For both adults and juveniles, Dane County's white arrest rate is about 80% that of Milwaukee County, while its black arrest rate is about 150% that of Milwaukee. Among adults, the black/white disparity in arrests in Dane County was about 9 to 1 in 1998-9 (compared with 5 to 1 for the County of Milwaukee); among juveniles, the black/white disparity in Dane County arrests was 3.2 to 1 compared to 1.6 to 1 in Milwaukee County. Dane County's black/white adult arrest disparity was about 13 to 1 for the most serious crimes (homicide, robbery, aggravated assault, sexual assault, burglary, auto theft, arson), 24 to 1 for drug offenses except marijuana possession, 10 to 1 for marijuana possession, and 15 to 1 for simple assault. For juveniles, the black/white disparity in arrests for the most serious crimes was 9 to 1, 8 to 1 for drug charges other than marijuana possession, 3.6 to 1 for marijuana possession, and 6 to 1 for theft and simple assault.