

America's Prison Population

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Introduction

While the extent of this topic cannot be covered in this presentation, this research project will be aiming to demonstrate how the American criminal justice system prevails as a form of systematic racism. This was particularly true in the '90s. During 1991 through 1998, the overall U.S. crime rate decreased by 22%, which was an excellent development as prior to 91', the crime rate was at the highest level ever recorded by the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting program. Conversely, the U.S. prison population rose from 789,610 inmates to 1,252,830 (59% increase) in just those seven years.

While some may conclude that the contrast in incarceration is reflective to the decline of crime, this disparity may be due to economic expansion, changes in the drug trade, and new approaches to policing.

Researching previous publications and current events, this project serves to raise awareness of the ongoing injustices targeting minorities in America.

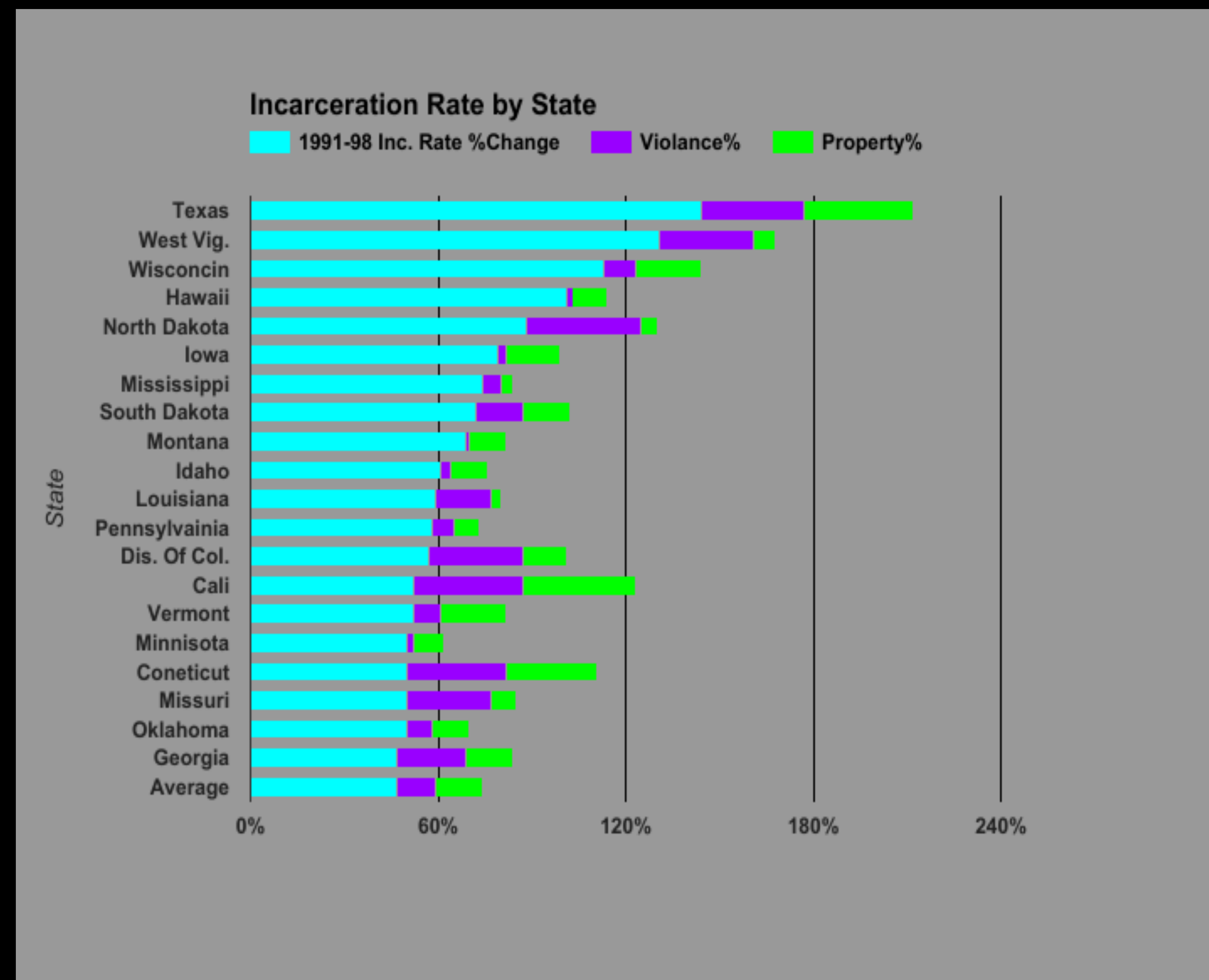
"We figured out what to do with criminals. Innovations in policing helped, but the key insight was an old one: Look'em up."
-Charles Murray, American Enterprise Institute

History

Nixon Era → Mass incarceration sparked in big numbers for the first time in 1970. From there on, the incarceration rate skyrocketed. Here are some examples of moments in our American history proving systematic racism:

- > The 1960's war on drugs and law and order.
- > The Nixon administration has come forth to tell the truth about what Nixon was really trying to do with America's youth and urban communities.
- > "The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies. The antiwar left and black people. You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did." -1968 Domestic Policy Chief, John Ehrlichman. (This demonstrates why there was such a rise in incarceration rates in the 1960's.)
- > Throughout the 80's crack cocaine had made its mark on urban and suburban cities in America. For years there was a higher penalty for being arrested for crack rock and not powdered cocaine. While crack rock was a derivative drug of powdered cocaine, it had been extremely pervasive in many urban cities and people would receive longer sentences for being caught with it. However, powdered cocaine was found more in suburban communities where wealthy people who were caught with it would receive a much lesser charge.
- > And Last but not least, the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 destroyed family homes, militarized the police around America which can be attributed to the brutality and force we see today.

Changes in Incarceration and Crime Rates by State, 1991 - 1998



Summary

The U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world. The statistics state that the U.S. comprises 5% of the world's population, yet accounts for 25% of global incarceration population. While the quest for equality across all boundaries is an issue that all marginalized communities face, I believe it to be imperative for America to demand that our government discontinue wrongful and/or disproportionate prison sentences. I will continue to research this topic and work to find solutions to this issue and others similar to it.



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All work cited
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