

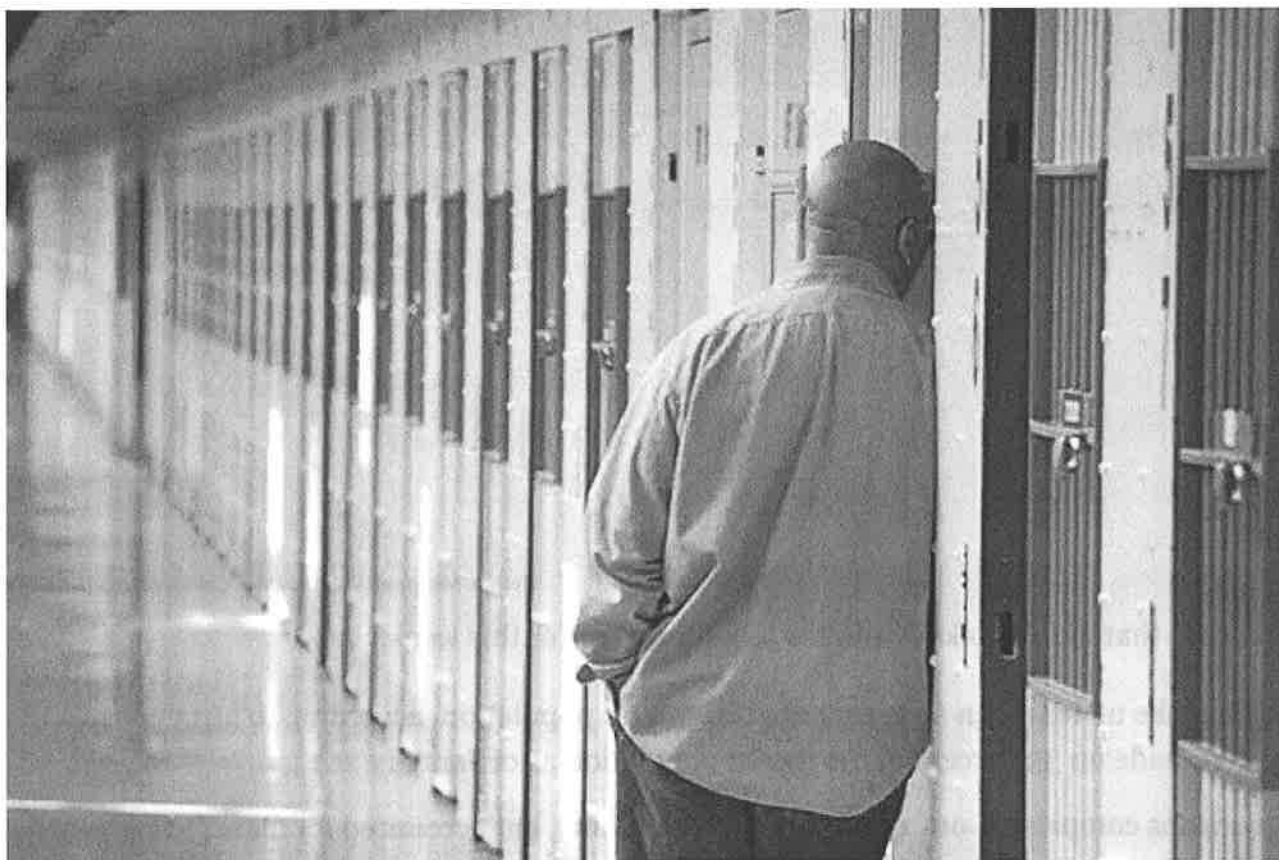
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POLITICS & POLICY

Minnesota's other prison problem: race

By Andy Mannix | 06/26/2015



Minnesota Department of Corrections

Black people make up less than 6 percent of Minnesota's population, according to 2013 census estimates, but made up 35 percent of the prison population as of January 2015.

Minnesota's prisons have a population problem.

As MinnPost reported earlier this week, the state's incarceration rate jumped 42 percent from 2000 to 2013, due in large part to crackdowns on meth and DWI offenders during Gov. Tim Pawlenty's time in office. As a consequence of that increase, the Department of Corrections is running out of places to put inmates, and will ask the Legislature for \$85 million next year to expand one of its facilities.

But Minnesota's prison system has another big problem: People of color make up a vastly disproportionate percentage of the inmates.

Minnesota prison inmates by race

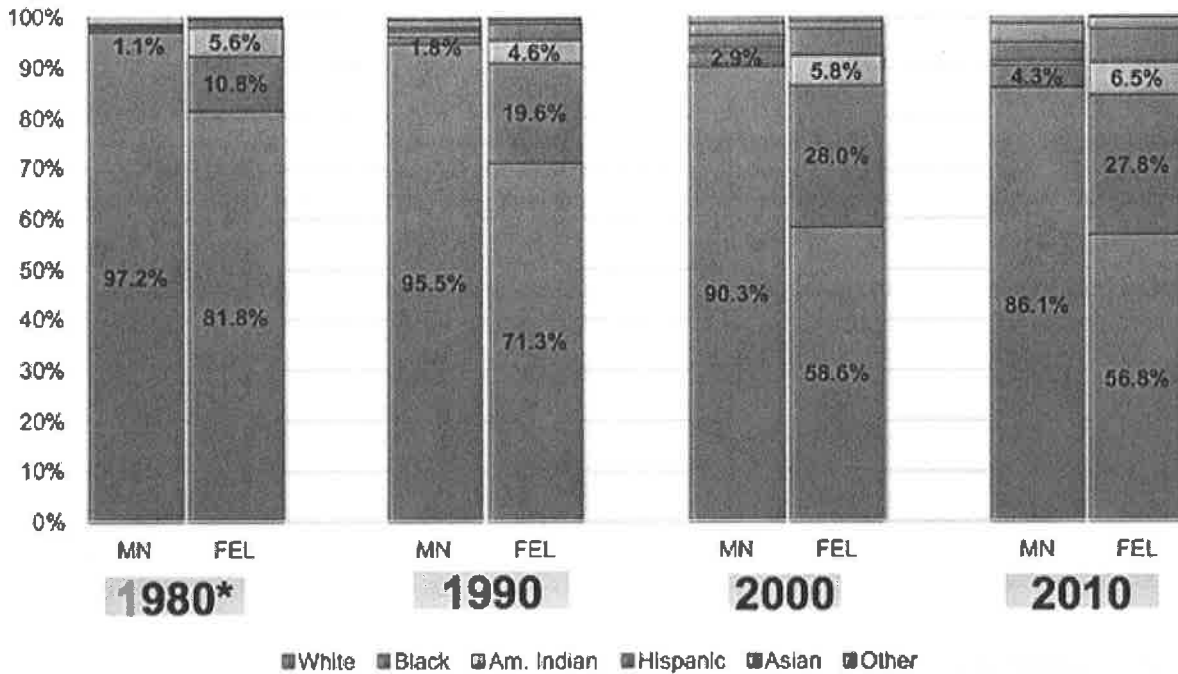
Source: Minnesota Department of Corrections; U.S. Census

Here are a few stats that didn't make it into the story from earlier this week:

- Black people make up less than 6 percent of Minnesota's population, according to 2013 census estimates, but made up 35 percent of the prison population as of January 2015.
- Native Americans comprise about 1 percent of Minnesotans, but accounted for about 10 percent of the state's prisoners.
- White people make up the vast majority of the state population — 86 percent — but only 53 percent of the inmate population.

This is not a new problem. In its report to the Legislature this year, the Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commission — which develops criminal sentencing guidelines and monitors data — broke down race of felony offenders over the past 35 years.

Figure 4. Distribution of MN Population by Race (MN) Compared to Distribution of Felony Offenders (FEL): 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010



* In 1980, the census information for people 18 years of age and older was broken into three racial categories: white, black, and Hispanic. The grey block at the top indicates people who were not in one of these three racial categories.

Source: Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commission

In 1980, blacks made up a mere 1 percent of the state’s population, but almost 11 percent of felony offenders. By 2000, blacks accounted for 3 percent of Minnesotans and almost 30 percent of felons.

Native Americans have consistently accounted for a sliver of Minnesota’s racial makeup. The 1980 census didn’t even include them as a race category. Yet that year they comprised 6 percent of felons.

As a 2013 report from the Council on Black Minnesotans points out, people of color face many disparities in Minnesota beyond the criminal justice system, including higher rates of poverty, infant mortality and high school dropouts.

“Minnesota has some of the worst social economic disparities between blacks and whites around the country,” says Richard Frase, criminal justice professor for the University of Minnesota. “And people don’t get any better sitting in prison for a couple years.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



Andy Mannix

Andy Mannix is an investigative/data reporter for MinnPost, covering criminal justice, public policy and many other topics. Follow him on Twitter at @andrewmannix or shoot him an email at amannix@minnpost.com.

COMMENTS (1)

SUBMITTED BY JOHN APPELEN ON 06/28/2015 - 10:38 PM.

Marriage Matters

Marriage and a 2 Parent Family makes a big difference. Though folks here won't like the source, there are many good graphs in it.

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/09/marriage-americas-greatest-weapon-against-child-poverty>

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