

Racism, prisons, and the future of black america

[Law](#), [Criminal Justice](#)



Racism, Prisons, and the Future of Black America I came upon an article bearing the above title after entering the word ' race' into my web browser search bar. After skimming through the article, I became interested in the topic and decided it would be worthy for using in my Race in the Media Analysis. The topic mentioned is that of the staggering number of Blacks within American prisons. In the year the article was published (2000), the number of incarcerated Blacks were slightly over half of the entire American prison population of roughly 2 million. According to the author, Manning Marable (a black man), that meant that 1 out of every 35 blacks are in prison. These figures astonished me and made me curious as to the cause of such disturbing statistics. However, I had a notion of possible causes. I would expect to find that the reason for such large numbers is based upon poverty, and the amounts of Blacks that grow up in ghettos. If blacks make up the majority of inhabitants of America's poorest neighborhoods, than that would be an obvious answer. It is my belief that people are more or less products of their environments, and if you grow up where there is poverty and crime, you are likely to remain poor and become a criminal. If a man or woman feels that there are no opportunities for them to make a decent living through an ethical job, then they will naturally look towards crime as a solution. It is simply a survival instinct. After reading the article, it became apparent that the author's emphasis was on disparities in the criminal justice system in regard to race, specifically black versus white. Marable points out many statistics that suggest the presence of racism in within the court system. Some of these are:

- Among youth offenders, 66% of whites are referred to juvenile courts while only 31% of blacks are taken there.
- For

young people who have never been to prison, blacks are nine times more likely than whites to be sentenced to juvenile prisons. • For youths charged with drug offenses, blacks are 48 times more likely than whites to be sent to juvenile prison. • White youths charged with violent offenses are incarcerated on average for 193 days after trial, blacks for 254 days, and Latinos for 305 days. I think that these numbers can be interpreted in different ways, and I believe that the author would like us to believe that the courtrooms of America are indeed racist. These numbers are suggesting, but they are not obvious evidence for racism. The way in which the article is worded is exuberant with feelings of black inequality. The statistics that Manning Marable uses to back up his racism conspiracy are so general that no conclusions can be drawn from them at, and I can't help but wonder if he actually withheld information so that the numbers would work to his advantage. To illustrate my point, take the figure of the youths charged with drug offenses; that doesn't specify the details necessary for correctly analyzing this data from a race-critical standpoint. We don't know how much drugs these people were found with, which would determine the severity of sentencing. If statistics show that blacks are 48 times more likely to be arrested with over a kilo of cocaine than whites, then it would be obvious that this is not a racial issue. This author's use of statistics does not do justice to his claim of a racist court system in America and only makes himself look bad for using such deceiving numbers. I am not saying that Manning Marable is wrong (I don't have enough information), but I think that this article is clearly an example of how the truth can be twisted or used in a suggestive manner by the media in order to serve their own interests (which

are usually to shock people). This article is one mans view on a subject far more intricate than he makes it out to be. As far as my beliefs are concerned, I will stick with my original hypothesis of this subject matter and conclude that people are a product of their environment. I believe that if a black man and a white man went before the same judge, and were convicted of identical crimes, that they would get identical sentences 99% of the time. I'm sure that a few racist judges exist, but I would think the motivation to enter that profession would be to serve justice, and justice does not discriminate.