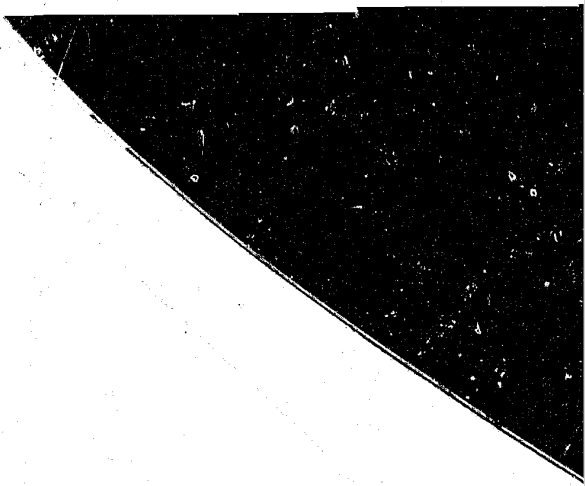


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Census of Jails and Survey of Jail Inmates 1978

National Prisoner Statistics Bulletin
No. SD-NPS-J-6P, February 1979

Preliminary Report

More than 158,000 persons were being held in the Nation's locally operated jails as of February 1978, an increase of 12 percent over the 1972 total. The latest profile of jail inmates reflected the traditional, twofold function of a jail: a place for the temporary detention of the unconvicted and a confinement facility where many convicted persons--predominantly misdemeanants--serve out their sentences.¹ About 6 of every 10 jail inmates had been convicted of a crime.² In all, roughly three-fourths of such inmates had entered guilty pleas--many after plea bargaining--rather than standing trial, and the remainder had been judged guilty. Compared with State and Federal prisons, jails held a much smaller percentage of inmates for violent crimes, but larger proportions for property and public order offenses.

Some 4 out of every 10 jail inmates stood accused but not convicted of a crime, and about one-fifth of this group did not have a lawyer at the time of the survey. Most of those who had counsel (82 percent) were being represented by court-appointed lawyers, public defenders, or legal aid attorneys. Four-fifths of all unconvicted inmates remained in jail even though bail had been set for them by the authorities.

Whites outnumbered blacks in the Nation's jails, but the proportion of blacks in jail far exceeded their 12-percent share of the U.S. population. Inmates belonging to other minority races accounted for some

2 percent of all jail inmates. As in 1972, the 1978 jail population consisted predominantly of males.

The vast majority of inmates were young men in their twenties. Three out of five had not completed high school, and 43 percent were jobless prior to being jailed. Not surprisingly, their reported average income was extremely low--a median of only \$3,255 during the year prior to arrest. One in four had a record of military service, most of them during the Vietnam era.

Sixteen percent of the inmates admitted to being regular heroin users, and another 10 percent had used heroin occasionally at some time during their lives.

Nearly half of the Nation's 3,493 jails, holding about 43 percent of the inmates, were in the South. For every 100,000 inhabitants in the Nation as a whole, there were 76 inmates held in locally operated jails; on a regional basis, the highest ratio was in the West, the lowest in the North Central States.³ Among the 45 States having jails, Georgia, Nevada, Alabama, and Louisiana ranked highest in the ratio of inmates to population, but none of these States was among the top four in terms of the total jail population. California, Texas, New York, and Florida each held at least 10,000 persons in jail; California, with more than 26,000 inmates, held more than twice as many as each of the other three States.

¹In this report, a jail consists of a confinement facility administered by a local law enforcement agency, intended for adults but sometimes also containing juveniles, which holds persons detained pending adjudication and/or persons committed after adjudication for sentences usually of a year or less. Temporary holding facilities, or lockups, that do not hold persons after being formally charged

in court (usually within 48 hours of arraignment) are excluded.

²Information gathered from administrative records used in conducting the 1978 National Jail Census yielded another distribution, approximately 50 percent each for convicted and unconvicted, on the detention status of inmates. The nature of the difference will be discussed in future reports.

³Five States--Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Rhode Island, and Vermont--had integrated jail-prison systems and, therefore, were excluded in calculating the rate of inmates per 100,000 population at the regional and national levels. Alaska, which had 6 locally operated jails in addition to an integrated jail-prison system, was included in the calculation.

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