

H A R L A N R I C H A R D S

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Racism In Wisconsin Prisons

If you are reading this entry to find out how the Wisconsin prison system discriminates against blacks and other minorities you'll be disappointed. This essay exposes discrimination against whites.

When I was in Fox Lake in the 1990s, there were more black than white prisoners in the Fox Lake prison and the entire prison system. I wrote a blog entry dated September 19, 2011 assuming that there were still more blacks than whites in Wisconsin prisons. I opined that the percentage would be higher if all the old white guys I saw in Stanley prison were released. Well, I was wrong about the percentages but right about the prevalence of old white guys in prison.

I recently had a chance to see the Wisconsin prison population data for the end of 2014 and how it compared to the end of the year 2000. The following table is an excerpt of that data:

Wis. DOC Prison Population Data By Race - 2000 & 2014  
(numbers in the chart represent percentages of the total)

Race	Male		Female	
	2000	2014	2000	2014
White	48.8	53.6	47.5	69.8
Black	47.4	42.0	48.4	23.2
Native American	3.0	3.2	3.6	6.0
Hispanic	7.6	9.5	4.9	3.1

While the white population increased 5.9%, the black population decreased by 13.9%. At the same time, the age of prisoners 45 and older more than doubled from 12.1% to 27.9%.

This is the smoking gun that proves my claim that the DOC is intentionally holding older white prisoners in prison longer to offset the large numbers of black being sent to prison. It's particularly noticeable in the female population where whites went from 47.5% to 69.8% and blacks dropped from 48.4% to 23.2%. Clearly, white prisoners are being kept in prison longer just because they are white.

If we were rich Republicans there would be numerous right-wing conservative groups falling all over each other to file a lawsuit on our behalf. But the fact that we are prisoners conflicts with one of their core values - that anyone in prison has no rights or entitlements and should never be released.

Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker is running for president and intends to gain the nomination by being the most conservative ideologically driven candidate. He is not going to rectify this injustice (or even admit it is occurring).

The NAACP, ACLU and prison rights organizations will not help us either because they're focused on reducing the number of black prisoners (I suspect that their repeated accusations of discriminatory treatment by incarcerating large numbers of blacks who commit crimes has driven the DOC to retain old white prisoners to make their stats look better). There's a reason more blacks than whites come to prison: as a segment of society, they commit more crimes. It's not because of their race, it is because most blacks grow up in a culture that encourages and rewards unlawful behavior. Whites who grow up in the same culture adopt the same criminal values as their peers and also come to prison.

If the DOC stopped recording the race of each prisoner and instead categorized them by their socio-economic status and where they lived, they would have a more accurate picture of who is committing crimes and why. Most people in mainstream society do not commit crimes or come to prison. Those who are poor, especially those living in the inner city, are the most likely to commit crimes and come to prison. The fact that many of these people are black has nothing to do with their behavior. It is a spurious correlation to conclude that their race is what is sending them to prison. It is unlawful behavior which sends people to prison.

I'd like to see a level, fair playing field for all prisoners seeking release. There is an online petition located at [prisonforum.org](http://prisonforum.org) seeking to force the Wisconsin parole commission to use objective criteria in parole hearings so that prisoners are given a fair chance at release on parole. If they start issuing fair, nonpolitical decisions, you will see the number of old white guys being held in prison reduced significantly. That will free up resources to be used in protecting the public from criminals that actually pose a risk.

[prisonforum.org](http://prisonforum.org)