

Over the last 30 years the “war on drugs” has been the main instrument through which the U.S. government has carried out mass incarceration and the demonization of Black and Latino youth. A major focus of this war on the people has been arresting people for marijuana. The prison population in the USA went from about half a million in 1980 to 2.3 million in 2006—an increase of over 450 percent. And a huge number of those put behind bars during this prison boom are African-Americans and Latinos, males and females —convicted of minor drug violations, but in many cases given long sentences.

Marijuana Laws in a World of Oppression and Discrimination

No more generations of our youth, here and all around the world, whose life is over, whose fate has been sealed, who have been condemned to an early death or a life of misery and brutality, whom the system has destined for oppression and oblivion even before they are born. I say no more of that.

Bob Avakian
BASics 1:13

WHO GETS ARRESTED AND IMPRISONED FOR MARIJUANA:

Explosion in U.S. prison population has been driven by convictions for **relatively minor** drug offenses. More than **1.8 million people** are arrested every year on nonviolent drug charges. From 1985-2000: Drug offenses accounted for about **two-thirds the increase** in the federal prison population, and more than **half of the increase** in state prisons. Nationally, African-Americans are **13 times** more likely to be incarcerated on drug charges than whites, **despite similar rates** of drug use.

Major surveys of **marijuana use** show white people use marijuana **more** than Blacks. However, the rate of arrest for marijuana use in New York City, for example, is **seven times higher** for young Black people and four times higher for young Latinos than it is for whites.

Having a small amount of marijuana is a civil violation in NYC (like a speeding ticket). But having it “open to public view” is a misdemeanor. During “**stop and frisk**” the **police often trick people** into revealing they have marijuana – with the lie that “if I frisk you and find drugs it will be worse.” Then if people take out a joint and hand it over, they have moved from a simple violation to a misdemeanor.

2009: A **record 580,000 stop-and-frisks** in New York City; **55 percent Black, 32 percent Latino**, most young, almost all male. Only six percent resulted in arrests, many for small amounts of marijuana. African-Americans **nine times more likely to be frisked than whites**.

California: **850,000 arrests** for possession of **small amounts of marijuana** in the last 20 years; half-a-million in the last 10 years (2007-2009 statistics). In California’s 25 largest counties, Blacks make up **7 percent of the population** but accounted for **20 percent of the marijuana possession arrests** (2006-2008 statistics)



Caddo Juvenile Detention Center in Shreveport, Louisiana, 2010.

From 2006-2008, major cities in California arrested and prosecuted Latinos for marijuana possession at **double to nearly triple** the rate of whites. Despite equal rates of drug use proportionate to their populations, Hispanics are twice as likely as whites, and equally as likely as Blacks, to be admitted to state prison for a drug offense.

Between 1986-1991, **overall incarceration of women increased 433 percent**—a 241 percent increase for white women, a 328 percent increase for Latina women, and a **828 percent increase for African-American women**.

The Criminalization of a Generation