

FACT SHEET: RACIAL BIAS AND DEATH PENALTY

“We simply cannot say we live in a country that offers equal justice to all Americans when racial disparities plague the system by which our society imposes the ultimate punishment.”

--Senator Russ Feingold on Civil Rights as a Priority for the 108th Congress, January 2003

Racial Bias...

...in Wisconsin

- African-Americans are imprisoned at a higher rate in Wisconsin than in any other state.¹

...in Executions:

- Since 1977, blacks and whites have been the victims of murders in almost equal numbers, yet 80% of the people executed in that period were convicted of murders involving white victims.ⁱ

...on Death Row:

- While they make up 12% of the population, African Americans account for 43% of current death row inmates.ⁱⁱ
- Jurisdictions with the highest percentages of minorities on its death row:ⁱⁱⁱ
 - U.S. Military (86%) Colorado (80%) Louisiana (72%)
- In North Carolina, the odds of receiving a death sentence rose by 3.5 times among those defendants whose victims were white.^{iv}
- Odds of receiving the death penalty in Philadelphia increased by 38% when the accused was black.^v

...at Trial:

- During 1980s, prosecutors in Georgia sought the death penalty for 70% of black defendants with white victims, but for only 15% of white defendants with black victims.^{vi}
- Between 1983 and 1993, prosecutors in Philadelphia voted to remove 52% of potential black jurors while trying to remove only 23% of other potential jurors.^{vii}

ⁱ Bureau of Justice Statistics.

ⁱⁱ “Death by Discrimination – The Continuing Role of Race in Capital Cases.”—Amnesty International, April 24, 2003.

ⁱⁱⁱ “Race and the Death Penalty”—ACLU, 2003.

^{iv} Prof. Jack Boger and Dr. Isaac Unah, University of North Carolina, 2001.

^v “The Death Penalty in Black and White”—Death Penalty Information Center, 1998

^{vi} David Baldus, University of Iowa, 1997.

^{vii} “Race and the Death Penalty”—ACLU, 2003.

¹ Anita Weier, “Black Inmates at Issue; Why is State Incarceration Rate Highest in U.S.” The Capital Times, November 18, 2005