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# **Incarceration Trends in Mississippi 1988-2008**

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## Incarceration Trends in Mississippi, 1988-2008

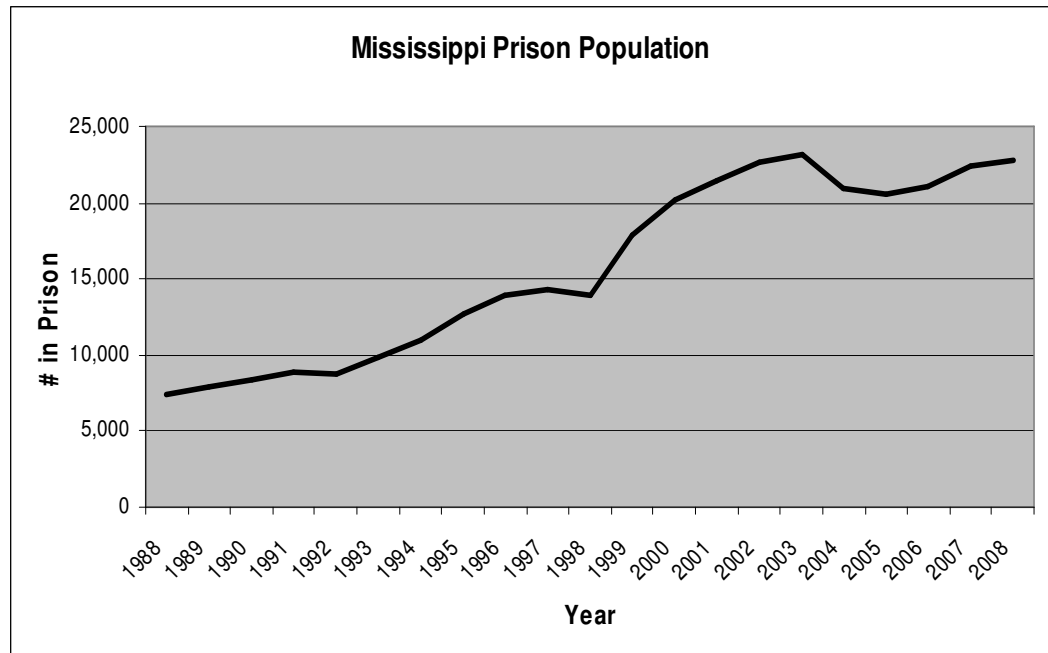
### Key Findings:

- Mississippi has the second highest rate of incarceration in the nation.
- Since 1988, there has been a tripling in the number of persons in prison in Mississippi.
- Nearly two-thirds (64%) of Mississippi prisoners are incarcerated for non-violent property and drug offenses, compared to half of the prison population nationally.
- Mississippi incarcerates a much higher proportion of persons for drug offenses than other states, 36% of the prison population, compared to 20% nationally.

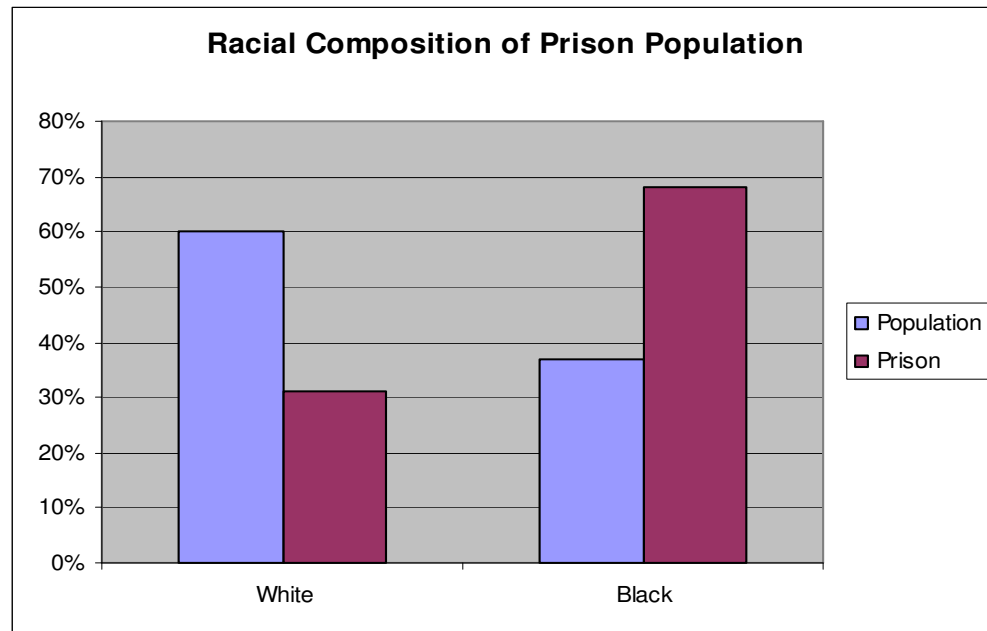
Mississippi has experienced a dramatic increase in the number of persons in prison over the last two decades. Since 1988, the total number of persons in prison in Mississippi has more than tripled, increasing by 208% (see Figure 1) from 7,384 to 22,754 in 2008. This exceeds the national rate of growth of 133% during the same period.

Mississippi incarcerates its citizens at a higher *rate* than other states. The state's rate of incarceration of 735 per 100,000 population is second in the nation, trailing only Louisiana. The state imprisons people at a rate 65% higher than the national average for the states of 445 per 100,000.

As the number of people in prison has grown in Mississippi, a substantial proportion of that growth has consisted of nonviolent drug and property offenders, who now comprise 64% of state prisoners; this includes 36% of the prison population whose primary offense was a drug crime. The expenditure associated with incarcerating just drug and nonviolent property law violators cost over \$244 million in FY 2008.



The use of imprisonment in Mississippi has been felt disproportionately in communities of color. African Americans comprise 37% of the state's population, but 68% of persons in prison. Conversely, whites, who comprise 60% of the state's population, represent 31% of the state prison population (see Figure 2). A 2007 analysis by The Sentencing Project found that blacks in Mississippi were incarcerated at 3.5 times the rate of whites. No separate data are compiled for Latinos in Mississippi.



States grappling with budget crises are confronted with the reality that continued increases in correctional costs have been competing with funding for higher education and other vital services. In recent years, states like Kansas and New Jersey produced declines in their prison populations. Both states enacted policy reforms that contributed to a reduction in state prison populations while maintaining public safety. A mix of administrative and legislative reforms in Kansas strengthened community supervision – probation and parole – and resulted in a reduction of revocations to prison for technical violations of probation or parole. In New Jersey, far fewer parolees are being sent back to prison for violations. During 2008, Kansas experienced a 9.3 percent decline in violent crime, while New Jersey achieved a 0.8 percent decline.

Reforms at the state level can result in tangible results that maintain public safety measures, use corrections resources more effectively and rely less on expanded incarceration. Such measures have included diversion of lower-level drug and property offenders, developing evidence-based parole policies, and supporting community-based sentencing alternatives.