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### Racial Disparities in Juvenile Drug Arrests

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## Racial Disparities in Juvenile Drug Arrests

by Jeffrey A. Butts

The enforcement of U.S. drug laws during the 1980s and 1990s had disparate impacts on black youth despite the fact that illegal drug use in the U.S. does not differ significantly by race (SAMHSA 2014). Even adolescent involvement in drug sales does not vary significantly by race. Studies find that black youth are only slightly more likely than white youth (6% vs. 5%) to be involved in any form of drug selling (Floyd et al. 2010).

According to the most recent national data available from the U.S. Department of Justice, however, drug arrest rates increased far more among black youth than among white youth in recent decades.

In 2012, according to DOJ's Bureau of Justice Statistics, law enforcement agencies across the United States made about 140,000 drug-related arrests involving youth under age 18. Most (87%) juvenile drug arrests are for possession, while 13 percent involve the selling or "manufacturing" of illegal drugs. Drug arrests in 2012 were down 34 percent compared with 1996. The decline was steepest among youth charged with sales and manufacturing (down 61%), while possession arrests dropped 26 percent since 1996.

During the 1980s and 1990s, arrest trends for possession showed clear racial disparities. In 1980, police actually recorded slightly more possession arrests per capita for white youth (155 per 100,000) than for black youth (118 per 100). Yet, by 1996 the black arrest rate had grown more than 350 percent to double the white arrest rate (419 vs. 208 per 100,000).

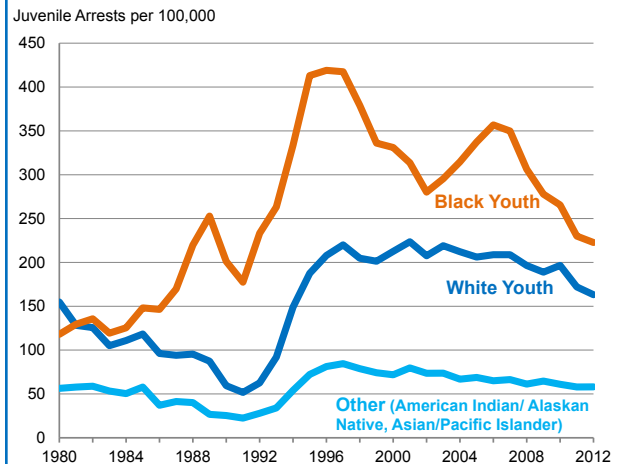
The most dramatic disparities were seen in arrests for drug sales and manufacturing. In 1980, drug sales arrests were somewhat more common among black youth than among white youth (42 vs. 23 per 100,000). By the end of the 1980s, however, black youth were arrested at a rate of nearly 300 per 100,000. Between 1980 and 1989, the rate of black arrests for drug selling grew 695 percent. By 2012, the rate had returned to the level of 1980 (46 per 100,000).

### REFERENCES:

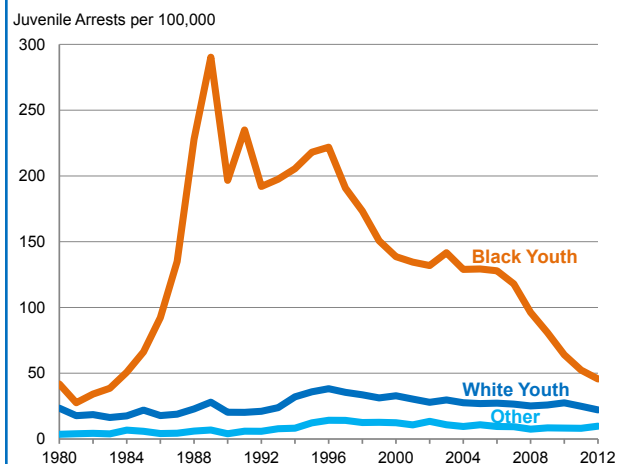
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Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2014). Results from the 2013 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Summary of National Findings, NSDUH Series H-48, HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4863, Figure 2.12. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality.

### Arrests for Drug Possession



### Arrests for Drug Sales/Manufacturing



**DATA SOURCE:** National estimates are based on data disseminated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). See Snyder, H.N. & Mulako-Wangota, J. (2014). Arrest Data Analysis Tool. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics. Arrest rates are calculated by BJS as the number of estimated arrests per 100,000 population ages 0-17. Racial categories are those published by BJS and promulgated by the U.S. Bureau of the Census.