



SAN FRANCISCO'S

HIGH AFRICAN AMERICAN ARREST RATE:

Sorting through the data to expose the facts.

The extraordinarily high arrest rate of African Americans in San Francisco has been brought to the attention of city authorities, including the Board of Supervisors, Human Rights Commission, and Commission on the Status of Women, repeatedly over the last five years. Although officials expressed shock and outrage at the extreme arrest disparities, there is little evidence of follow up action to address them. Now, the issue has been raised in the press (“High African American arrest rate raises call for inquiry,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 17, 2006). In an effort to continue the dialogue, and to seek appropriate policy responses, CJCJ conducted a brief study of the egregiously high rates of African American arrests in the San Francisco. .

Officials and community sources cited in the Chronicle story depict San Francisco's crime as worse and more violent than in the past, which they attribute to poverty, increased police presence in African American neighborhoods and to behavior of African American youth.

Sorting accurate from inaccurate claims about crime leads to a new set of conclusions that promise dramatically new views and strategies—ones which require flexible thinking and willingness to look at an old problem in the innovative ways for which San Francisco has proven famous.

Fact: San Francisco's African American population suffers disproportionate arrest levels greater than African Americans elsewhere in California.

Table 1 shows the annual arrest rates for African Americans in San Francisco for felonies versus those of African Americans statewide, along with the discrepancies, for the five-year 2001-05 period.

Table 1. Felony arrest rates, all ages, San Francisco (SF) African American and Non-African American vs. rest of California (CA-SF), five-year average, 2001-2005

	Arrests per 100,000 population						Arrest rate
	African American			Non-African American			SF African American vs.
	<u>SF</u>	<u>CA-SF</u>	<u>SF vs. CA</u>	<u>SF</u>	<u>CA-SF</u>	<u>SF vs. CA</u>	<u>SF Non-African American</u>
Both sexes							
Age 10-17	11,615.4	3,824.0	3.04	1,313.9	1,189.1	1.10	8.84
18-29	37,475.4	9,357.0	4.01	3,180.3	3,096.1	1.03	11.78
30-39	26,546.2	6,031.7	4.40	1,595.9	1,871.1	0.85	16.63
40-69	16,052.2	3,552.1	4.52	966.1	678.0	1.42	16.62
<u>70+</u>	<u>220.3</u>	<u>169.6</u>	<u>1.30</u>	<u>35.2</u>	<u>35.3</u>	<u>1.00</u>	<u>6.26</u>
Total	19,381.2	5,044.8	3.84	1,472.2	1,408.8	1.05	13.16
Male							
Age 10-17	17,386.7	6,147.6	2.83	2,084.6	1,921.7	1.08	8.34
18-29	57,231.0	14,405.2	3.97	5,399.8	4,858.9	1.11	10.60
30-39	40,035.5	9,130.0	4.39	2,511.5	2,833.0	0.89	15.94
40-69	25,955.9	5,811.7	4.47	1,559.1	1,081.4	1.44	16.65
<u>70+</u>	<u>540.5</u>	<u>365.7</u>	<u>1.48</u>	<u>77.3</u>	<u>72.0</u>	<u>1.07</u>	<u>6.99</u>
Total	30,589.0	8,054.4	3.80	2,424.7	2,265.7	1.07	12.62
Female							
Age 10-17	5,914.7	1,410.3	4.19	506.7	417.0	1.22	11.67
18-29	19,239.6	4,035.3	4.77	950.5	1,162.3	0.82	20.24
30-39	11,581.8	3,007.4	3.85	519.8	860.2	0.60	22.28
40-69	5,197.3	1,456.4	3.57	316.8	288.3	1.10	16.41
<u>70+</u>	<u>13.7</u>	<u>32.5</u>	<u>0.42</u>	<u>3.5</u>	<u>7.5</u>	<u>0.46</u>	<u>3.91</u>
Total	8,161.4	2,141.1	3.81	464.4	551.9	0.84	17.57

African Americans in San Francisco were nearly four times more likely to be arrested for felonies over the last five years than African Americans elsewhere in California. This trend is not shared by San Franciscans of other ethnicities, whose felony arrest levels are only marginally higher than those of non-African Americans statewide.

Within San Francisco, African Americans are 13 times more likely to be arrested for felonies than persons of other races, including a disparity of more than 1700% for African American women. The felony arrest disparities for African Americans in San Francisco, both compared to African Americans statewide and other races in the city, are greatest not among youth, but among African American men ages 30-69 and women ages 18-69.

Fact: The greatest disparities between arrest levels of San Francisco's African Americans and non-African Americans are not for violent crimes, but for drugs.

Table 2. Felony drug offense arrest rates, all ages, San Francisco (SF) African American and Non-African American vs. rest of California (CA-SF), five-year average, 2001-2005

<u>Age group</u>	Drug arrest rates per 100,000 population, 2001-2005						Arrest rates SF African American vs SF Non-African American
	African American			Non-African American			
	<u>SF</u>	<u>CA-SF</u>	<u>Difference</u>	<u>SF</u>	<u>CA-SF</u>	<u>Difference</u>	
Both sexes							
Age 10-17	1,860.1	311.0	5.98	185.6	117.8	1.58	10.02
18-29	16,618.5	2,323.7	7.15	1,190.8	834.7	1.43	13.96
30-39	10,698.9	1,923.2	5.56	490.8	609.3	0.81	21.80
40-69	6,197.5	1,416.8	4.37	285.3	229.7	1.24	21.72
<u>70+</u>	<u>74.8</u>	<u>51.5</u>	<u>1.45</u>	<u>6.2</u>	<u>3.1</u>	<u>1.98</u>	<u>11.98</u>
Total	7,613.9	1,426.8	5.34	472.1	387.5	1.22	16.13
Male							
Age 10-17	2,209.4	541.2	4.08	285.0	183.9	1.55	7.75
18-29	24,354.8	3,808.8	6.39	2,050.0	1,306.9	1.57	11.88
30-39	16,247.2	2,971.4	5.47	777.9	914.3	0.85	20.88
40-69	9,984.1	2,337.4	4.27	469.2	358.9	1.31	21.28
<u>70+</u>	<u>190.8</u>	<u>116.4</u>	<u>1.64</u>	<u>14.5</u>	<u>6.4</u>	<u>2.29</u>	<u>13.12</u>
Total	11,775.0	2,340.9	5.03	788.2	613.8	1.28	14.94
Female							
Age 10-17	1,515.2	71.9	21.07	81.6	48.2	1.69	18.57
18-29	9,477.3	758.1	12.50	327.6	316.7	1.03	28.93
30-39	4,543.8	900.0	5.05	153.4	288.9	0.53	29.62
40-69	2,047.2	563.0	3.64	83.9	104.9	0.80	24.40
<u>70+</u>	<u>0.0</u>	<u>6.3</u>	<u>0.00</u>	<u>0.0</u>	<u>0.7</u>	<u>0.00</u>	<u>n.a.</u>
Total	3,448.3	544.8	6.33	137.6	161.3	0.85	25.07

San Francisco African American male youth—the group typically blamed by authorities for dealing drugs—actually show the lowest racial disparities in felony arrests and drug arrests of any age.

The racial disparity in arrests is largest for drug offenses. African Americans are arrested in San Francisco for drug offenses at five times the rate of African Americans statewide and 16 times the rate of other races in the city. When compared to their statewide counterparts, young African American women ages 10-29 are 12 to 21 times more likely to be arrested for drug felonies. When compared to women of other races in their age groups, African American women ages 18-69 are 25 to 30 times more likely to be arrested for drugs.

San Francisco African American male youth—the group typically blamed by authorities for dealing drugs—actually show the lowest racial disparities in felony arrests and drug arrests of any age. In fact, African American youth of both sexes have *substantially lower* rates of drug felony arrests than older African Americans. As the table also shows, people of races other than African American are very unlikely to be arrested for drugs in San Francisco. The drug arrest rate for non-African American women in San Francisco is actually lower than for women elsewhere in California, an unusual pattern for an urban population.

Fact: Public health statistics indicate that arrest levels of San Francisco's African Americans for violent crimes are consistent with their levels of violent victimization. However, African Americans' arrest levels for drugs far exceed their contribution to the city's drug abuse problem.

Table 3. San Francisco African Americans: Arrests per 100,000 population for specific crimes and arrest rates compared to those of African Americans statewide

San Francisco African Americans vs statewide African Americans	Arrest rate and percent of arrests vs. percent of CA African American population, 2005					
	SF African American age 10-17		SF African American age 18-29		SF African American age 30-69	
	<u>Rate</u>	<u>Rate vs CA</u>	<u>Rate</u>	<u>Rate vs CA</u>	<u>Rate</u>	<u>Rate vs CA</u>
Crime measures						
<u>All arrests</u>	<u>19,036.5</u>	<u>1.97</u>	<u>55,713.2</u>	<u>2.45</u>	<u>28,534.7</u>	<u>2.51</u>
<u>Felony arrests</u>	<u>12,123.9</u>	<u>3.06</u>	<u>33,985.8</u>	<u>3.12</u>	<u>18,079.9</u>	<u>3.57</u>
<u>Violent felony</u>	<u>4,190.5</u>	<u>2.76</u>	<u>5,713.2</u>	<u>1.99</u>	<u>2,596.2</u>	<u>2.40</u>
Homicide	17.9	1.46	146.8	1.88	23.4	1.90
Rape	17.9	0.88	122.3	2.41	36.7	1.64
Robbery	3,044.4	3.82	1,810.6	2.18	487.2	3.27
Assault	1,110.3	1.61	3,633.5	1.91	2,048.9	2.29
<u>Property felony</u>	<u>3,062.3</u>	<u>2.12</u>	<u>4,600.0</u>	<u>1.79</u>	<u>3,260.3</u>	<u>3.35</u>
Burglary	1,199.9	1.63	1,737.2	1.66	1,157.9	3.69
Theft	716.3	2.13	1,737.2	1.85	1,618.4	3.37
MV theft	1,146.1	3.40	1,113.3	1.96	460.5	2.68
Arson	0.0	0.00	12.2	1.06	23.4	2.98
<u>Drug felony</u>	<u>1,378.9</u>	<u>4.17</u>	<u>15,047.7</u>	<u>5.09</u>	<u>7,174.6</u>	<u>3.55</u>
Narcotics	1,164.0	7.34	10,961.6	6.83	6,507.2	4.05
Marijuana	214.9	1.62	2,618.1	3.66	330.4	2.59
Dangerous	0.0	0.00	1,370.2	2.23	307.0	1.14
Other drug	0.0	0.00	97.9	3.94	30.0	2.07
Weapons	519.3	1.72	990.9	1.44	287.0	2.10
DUI	0.0	0.00	85.6	1.99	36.7	1.32
<u>Misdemeanors</u>	<u>6,912.6</u>	<u>1.21</u>	<u>21,727.4</u>	<u>1.83</u>	<u>10,454.8</u>	<u>1.66</u>
Assault	985.0	0.73	2,348.9	1.59	1,034.5	1.75
Theft	1,683.4	1.30	856.4	1.02	303.7	1.22
Marijuana	197.0	0.48	893.1	0.73	190.2	0.90
Other drugs	0.0	0.00	2,006.4	2.68	1,688.5	1.68
Prostitution	89.5	1.02	2,092.0	2.60	223.6	1.36
Drunk	35.8	0.65	526.1	0.79	360.4	0.71
DUI	0.0	0.00	1,003.2	0.84	367.1	0.52
Public health measures						
<u>Violent victimizations, 2004</u>	<u>268.6</u>	<u>2.72</u>	<u>1,186.7</u>	<u>2.94</u>	<u>270.3</u>	<u>1.71</u>
Homicides	71.6	4.27	318.1	3.38	40.0	1.32
Assaults	197.0	2.41	868.6	2.81	230.3	1.80
<u>Drug victimizations, 2004</u>	<u>35.8</u>	<u>1.03</u>	<u>195.7</u>	<u>2.03</u>	<u>637.4</u>	<u>3.44</u>
Overdose deaths	0.0	n.a.	12.2	1.99	110.1	3.35
Drug emergency cases	35.8	1.03	183.5	2.04	527.2	3.46

Table 4. San Francisco African Americans as percentage of population (2005), arrests (2005), and public health violence and drug abuse outcome measures (2004)

<u>San Francisco African Americans as a percentage of:</u>	<u>All CA African Americans</u>	<u>All San Franciscans</u>	<u>SF African Americans</u>	<u>All CA African Americans</u>	<u>All San Franciscans</u>
Population	2.3%	6.8%	48,350	2,093,658	706,039
Crime measures					
<u>All arrests</u>	<u>5.6%</u>	<u>44.7%</u>	<u>14,172</u>	<u>254,977</u>	<u>31,729</u>
<u>Felony arrests</u>	<u>7.8%</u>	<u>50.2%</u>	<u>8,873</u>	<u>113,520</u>	<u>17,681</u>
<u>Violent felony</u>	<u>5.1%</u>	<u>42.4%</u>	<u>1,479</u>	<u>28,736</u>	<u>3,487</u>
Homicide	4.1%	76.9%	20	487	26
Rape	4.2%	48.9%	22	522	45
Robbery	6.0%	60.7%	464	7,768	765
Assault	4.9%	36.7%	973	19,959	2,651
<u>Property felony</u>	<u>5.9%</u>	<u>47.3%</u>	<u>1,539</u>	<u>26,115</u>	<u>3,255</u>
Burglary	5.4%	49.1%	556	10,250	1,133
Theft	6.6%	46.1%	682	10,263	1,479
MV theft	5.5%	47.6%	293	5,356	616
Arson	3.3%	29.6%	8	246	27
<u>Drug felony</u>	<u>9.8%</u>	<u>57.3%</u>	<u>3,457</u>	<u>35,389</u>	<u>6,037</u>
Narcotics	11.7%	66.1%	2,911	24,872	4,406
Marijuana	6.9%	46.7%	325	4,694	696
Dangerous	3.7%	23.0%	204	5,559	886
Other drug	6.4%	34.7%	17	264	49
Weapons	3.7%	48.5%	196	5,293	404
DUI	3.7%	15.8%	18	482	114
Other property	3.2%	40.5%	90	2,840	222
<u>Misdemeanors</u>	<u>3.9%</u>	<u>37.7%</u>	<u>5,295</u>	<u>137,498</u>	<u>14,042</u>
Assault	3.2%	39.6%	557	17,285	1,406
Theft	2.3%	32.5%	263	11,284	808
Marijuana	1.6%	37.3%	141	8,616	378
Other drugs	4.7%	51.2%	670	14,341	1,309
Prostitution	4.6%	29.4%	243	5,291	827
Drunk	1.8%	20.2%	153	8,464	757
DUI	1.5%	15.3%	192	12,570	1,253
Public health measures					
<u>Violent victimizations, 2004</u>	<u>5.2%</u>	<u>37.5%</u>	<u>196</u>	<u>3,771</u>	<u>522</u>
Homicides	5.4%	60.9%	42	780	69
Assaults	5.1%	34.0%	154	2,991	453
<u>Drug victimizations, 2004</u>	<u>8.0%</u>	<u>24.6%</u>	<u>210</u>	<u>2,639</u>	<u>854</u>
Overdose deaths	8.7%	26.4%	34	393	129
Drug emergency cases	7.8%	24.3%	176	2,246	725

Tables 3 and 4 compare San Francisco African Americans' arrest rates by offense for the most recent year available, 2005, with those of public health records of deaths and hospital emergency treatments of African Americans for violent victimization and drug abuse. The table shows that San Francisco African Americans account for roughly 5% of the murders and violent victimizations of African Americans in the state, and 5% of arrests for violence.

Similarly, within San Francisco, African Americans comprise 37% of violent victimizations and 42% of violence arrests. There is a greater disparity for homicide (61% of murder victims, 77% of homicide arrests), indicating that—contrary to police statements—murders of African Americans have been somewhat easier to “clear” by an arrest than murders of other races.

This pattern indicates that the arrest rates of San Francisco African Americans for violent crimes reflects not police targeting, but a legitimate disparity founded in higher rates of violent victimization among African Americans in the city. However, the city's drug abuse pattern does not confirm the excessive arrest rates of African Americans in the city for drugs. African Americans comprise only about one-fourth of San Francisco's drug abuse deaths and hospital treatments, but 57% of the arrests for drugs in the city.

This pattern indicates that the arrest rates of San Francisco African Americans for violent crimes reflects not police targeting, but a legitimate disparity founded in higher rates of violent victimization among African Americans in the city.

Myth: San Francisco's lenient policing of drug use accompanied by harsh policing of drug sales is a race-neutral policy.

Table 5. Racial and age disparities in policing of drugs versus drug abuse, San Francisco, 2004-05

<u>Age/race</u>	<u>Percent of:</u>		<u>Drug arrests vs. drug cases</u>	<u>Drug abuse (deaths and hospital ER)</u>	<u>Drug arrests</u>		
	<u>Drug abuse</u>	<u>Drug arrests</u>			<u>Felony</u>	<u>Misd</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>Age 10-29</u>	<u>15.6%</u>	<u>40.5%</u>	<u>2.60</u>	<u>134</u>	<u>2,460</u>	<u>668</u>	<u>3,128</u>
African American	2.1%	15.4%	7.37	18	942	248	1,190
White	7.0%	21.2%	3.05	60	1,307	334	1,641
Other	5.5%	3.8%	0.70	47	211	86	297
<u>Age 30-69</u>	<u>84.4%</u>	<u>59.5%</u>	<u>0.70</u>	<u>727</u>	<u>3,577</u>	<u>1,019</u>	<u>4,596</u>
African American	21.6%	35.1%	1.63	186	2,150	563	2,713
White	48.3%	20.3%	0.42	416	1,200	366	1,566
Other	13.7%	4.1%	0.30	118	227	90	317
Total, all ages, races				861	6,037	1,687	7,724

Table 5 compares arrests for drugs versus deaths/treatments for drug abuse by race in San Francisco (the SFPD lists only three races in arrest reports).

San Francisco's de facto policy of going easy on drug use while cracking down on drug sales and manufacture contributes to a double problem: (a) the large over-arrest of young and African American populations, and under-arrest of older whites, compared to their respective contributions to the city's drug abuse problems, and (b) failure to stem San Francisco's serious drug abuse epidemic lodged in older populations.

Younger African Americans are arrested for drug offenses at more than seven times the rate at which their contribution to the city's drug abuse woes (as measured by drug overdose deaths and hospital emergency cases) indicates, while older whites are arrested far less than their drug abuse problems would indicate. Were policing of drugs targeted at drug abuse, older whites would be arrested in far larger numbers and younger ages, particularly African Americans, at much lower rates.

San Francisco's de facto policy of going easy on drug use while cracking down on drug sales and manufacture contributes to ... the failure to stem a serious drug abuse epidemic lodged in older populations.

Myth: The city's chief crime problems and the worst racial arrest disparities are centered in African American youth.

Table 6. San Francisco African Americans: Arrests per 100,000 population vs. San Franciscans of all races, by age

San Francisco African Americans vs. San Franciscans of all races, by age group	Percent of arrests versus percent of population, 2005				
	SF African American vs total SF population of corresponding ages:				
	All ages	age 10-17	All adult	age 18-29	age 30-69
	Crime measures				
<u>All arrests</u>	<u>6.52</u>	<u>4.55</u>	<u>6.79</u>	<u>6.93</u>	<u>7.03</u>
<u>Felony arrests</u>	<u>7.33</u>	<u>4.70</u>	<u>7.67</u>	<u>7.82</u>	<u>7.94</u>
<u>Violent felony</u>	<u>6.19</u>	<u>4.39</u>	<u>6.33</u>	<u>6.61</u>	<u>6.51</u>
Homicide	11.23	8.71	11.68	12.13	13.23
Rape	7.14	8.71	7.34	9.55	6.40
Robbery	8.86	5.16	9.45	10.38	9.47
Assault	5.36	3.07	5.66	5.46	6.03
<u>Property felony</u>	<u>6.90</u>	<u>5.30</u>	<u>7.07</u>	<u>6.99</u>	<u>7.21</u>
Burglary	7.17	5.96	7.26	6.99	7.65
Theft	6.73	4.91	6.85	6.89	6.96
MV theft	6.95	5.12	6.94	7.24	7.17
Arson	4.33	0.00	5.12	3.44	5.57
<u>Drug felony</u>	<u>8.36</u>	<u>5.05</u>	<u>8.80</u>	<u>9.08</u>	<u>9.09</u>
Narcotics	9.65	5.10	10.19	9.88	10.77
Marijuana	6.82	5.50	7.11	8.43	6.21
Dangerous	3.36	0.00	3.55	6.13	2.44
Other drug	5.07	n.a.	5.33	7.64	4.39
Weapons	7.08	4.86	7.29	7.14	8.28
DUI	2.31	n.a.	2.43	2.11	2.92
<u>Misdemeanors</u>	<u>5.51</u>	<u>4.31</u>	<u>5.69</u>	<u>5.88</u>	<u>5.87</u>
Assault	5.78	5.33	5.86	6.36	5.88
Theft	4.75	4.79	3.89	4.47	3.74
Marijuana	5.45	4.56	5.60	5.32	7.12
Other drugs	7.47	0.00	7.89	6.58	8.71
Prostitution	4.29	3.11	4.50	6.44	2.84
Drunk	2.95	5.81	3.08	2.04	4.17
DUI	2.24	n.a.	2.36	2.40	2.50
	Public health measures				
<u>Violent victimizations, 2004</u>	<u>5.48</u>	<u>3.73</u>	<u>5.71</u>	<u>8.50</u>	<u>4.31</u>
Homicides	8.89	8.71	8.99	12.41	6.26
Assaults	4.96	3.09	5.21	7.63	4.09
<u>Drug victimizations, 2004</u>	<u>3.59</u>	<u>0.83</u>	<u>3.84</u>	<u>2.41</u>	<u>4.07</u>
Overdose deaths	3.85	0.00	4.12	1.32	4.30
Drug emergency cases	3.54	0.92	3.79	2.55	4.03

When discussing crime in the city, including racial disparities, San Francisco police, officials, and community leaders overwhelmingly cite “youth” as the chief problem. In fact, the opposite is the case. As Tables 6 and 7 show, the highest rates of arrest and—especially—the biggest growth in serious crime and worst racial disparities in arrest patterns involve adults. Even if the arrest levels of youth are doubled (that is, offenses

divided not by the defined youth population of 10-17, as is customary, but 14-17), felony, violence, and drug arrest rates for African American youth are lower than for adults of all ages up to late middle age.

Myth: San Francisco's serious and violent criminals are getting "younger and younger."

This statement (repeated not just in San Francisco, but in virtually every jurisdiction) is not just wrong, it is absurd—especially when made by police. Unless police today are, for unknown reasons, refusing to arrest young criminals, their own statistics show the criminal and violent population, for all races, has been getting *older and older*—rapidly.

Table 7. San Francisco's felony arrest rates by age.

San Francisco felony arrest rates by age:	Absolute change	Rate change	Rate/100,000 pop.		Arrest numbers		Population	
			2005	1980	2005	1980	2005	1980
age 5-9	-89%	-90%	12.8	132.4	4	38	31,354	28,706
10-14	-47%	-43%	1,126.0	1,969.5	341	646	30,285	32,801
15-19	-36%	-11%	6,385.1	7,144.4	1,961	3,038	30,712	42,523
20-24	-24%	+47%	7,836.1	5,320.9	2,632	3,480	33,588	65,402
25-29	-11%	+25%	4,202.9	3,371.1	2,424	2,728	57,675	80,924
30-39	+38%	-16%	2,294.8	2,721.4	4,366	3,162	190,255	116,192
40-49	+301%	+111%	3,149.6	1,489.8	4,128	1,029	131,063	69,071
50-59	+255%	+157%	1,518.3	591.7	1,584	446	104,326	75,373
60+	+57%	+57%	188.1	120.0	241	154	128,135	128,324
All ages	+20%	+4%	2,397.8	2,302.6	17,681	14,721	737,393	639,316

As Table 7 shows, San Francisco, like other cities and California as a whole, has experienced mammoth declines in criminal offending by the youngest age groups combined with massive increases in serious crime by older ages. In 1980, 5% of felony arrestees were under age 15, 49% were under age 25, and 11% were 40 or older. In 2005, 2% were under age 15, 28% were under age 25, and 34% were 40 or older, respectively.

Astonishingly, San Francisco officials seem not to perceive how dramatically crime has shifted from younger to older age groups and continue to advance theories and remedies more appropriate to 1966 than to 2006. The chief reason for rising felonies among older ages, and declines among younger ages, is skyrocketing drug abuse—a trend that dramatically affects racial disparities in arrests.

Myth: The conditions of African Americans living in San Francisco are comparable to those of African Americans statewide.

Table 10. Percent of African American and non-African American San Francisco and other California residents living in poverty and low-income households, by age, 1999

Percent living on incomes below poverty level

Age	African American		Non-African American	
	SF	CA-SF	SF	CA-SF
Total	25.0%	22.3%	10.2%	13.8%
<15	37.3%	31.1%	10.9%	18.9%
15-17	28.7%	26.7%	14.9%	17.8%
18-24	30.6%	27.8%	20.9%	21.6%
25-34	23.6%	20.0%	8.5%	14.1%
35-44	26.2%	17.6%	8.5%	11.3%
45-54	23.0%	15.6%	7.8%	8.4%
55-64	17.4%	16.7%	10.2%	8.7%
65+	13.3%	15.3%	10.4%	7.6%

Percent with annual household income less than \$25,000

Age	African American		Non-African American	
	SF	CA-SF	SF	CA-SF
All ages	43.9%	37.1%	23.3%	25.6%
<25	58.7%	63.9%	35.5%	49.7%
25-34	42.0%	38.5%	11.9%	24.1%
35-44	40.5%	30.5%	14.6%	18.7%
45-54	39.1%	27.6%	16.6%	16.2%
55-64	38.2%	33.6%	22.4%	20.3%
65+	51.9%	54.5%	42.8%	40.0%

Much of the discussion of crime and race in San Francisco ignores the fact that the city harbors among California's richest whites and Asians living near the state's most impoverished urban African American population.

African Americans in San Francisco suffer California's highest major-county poverty rates, with 25% of the population living in households with incomes below poverty guidelines (compared to 10% of non-African American populations). Among African American youth, poverty rates soar to 36% (versus 13% for youth of other races). Median household incomes in 1999 among San Francisco whites (\$65,431), Asians (\$49,496), and Hispanics (\$46,553) were far higher than for African American households (\$29,640); in fact, 43% of the city's African American households subsisted on annual incomes of less than \$25,000. These 1999 census figures have doubtless worsened as the 30-year exodus of San Francisco's middle-class African American population continues, leaving increasingly destitute populations behind.

Conclusion: A dramatically new approach needed

How, then, does San Francisco respond to such a crisis? The most promising strategies to reduce crime and racial disparities in arrests, then, are twofold.

First, the city should openly admit and address its burgeoning drug abuse and crime crises centered in middle-aged whites and African Americans. A policy of leniency toward drug use and severe policing of drug sales/manufacture strongly contributes to racial disparities in arrests. This point is not in any way to suggest increasing arrests of non-African American San Franciscans for drug use; arrest and incarceration have not proven effective measures to reduce drug abuse and may even exacerbate the problem. Rather, what is suggested is a coordinated city strategy targeting drug abuse by all ages and races, in which law enforcement would be integrated with services and treatment goals in a coordinated manner. Simply concentrating on arresting drug sellers is not a fair, effective, or reasonable plan.

The second strategy is to stop disparaging young people, and start improving quality of life in crime-impacted neighborhoods. One encouraging fact that must be kept in mind is that even though a greater proportion of youth arrested and locked up are African American, the actual numbers (and rates) of African American youth being arrested and incarcerated has declined in the last seven to 10 years. Indeed, if we look at serious crime, the percentage of African American youth arrested for felonies has dropped sharply from its peak in 1989 (20.4%) to 12.1% in 2005. Today's African American youth comprise a dominant and rising proportion of arrested and detained juveniles not because they are more criminal—in fact, they are less so—but because arrests and incarcerations of youth of other races have fallen even faster.

The city can build on the declining criminality of African American youth and concentrate on investing in reducing the severe poverty and unemployment the city's African American populations of all ages suffer and to halt the exodus of African Americans from the city. With such a high proportion of African Americans being arrested already, it is unlikely that strategies to further increase the number of African Americans being arrested will reduce serious crime.

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