

The Facts: Racism and the Death Penalty

Many studies have consistently demonstrated that the race of the victims, the defendants, or both, plays a significant factor in whether death notices are filed and death sentences are imposed. A disturbing fact unveiled in the Illinois report, "Governor's Commission on Capital Punishment" (April 15, 2002), was that Illinois' death row population consisted of 66% African-Americans, 20% of whom were convicted or condemned to die by all-white juries. Other studies have further shown that death is disproportionately imposed on African-American defendants and that this trend is heightened when an African-American is charged and convicted of killing a white victim. These same issues are prevalent in Washington State.

WASHINGTON STATE STATISTICS*

Race of Defendants

- Death has been sought in 40% of white defendant cases and in 31% of black defendant cases.
- Death has been imposed in 14% of the white defendant cases and 17% of the black defendant cases.

Race of Victims

- Death has been sought in 38% of white victim cases and in 11% of black victim cases.
- Death has been imposed in 14% of the white victim cases and 6% of the black victim cases.

Cross-racial

- Death notices have NEVER been filed in a case with a white defendant and black victim.
- Death notices have been filed in 42% of the cases with a black defendant and a white victim.
- Death sentences have NEVER been imposed in a case with a white defendant and black victim.
- Death sentences have been imposed in 21% of the cases where there is a black defendant and a white victim.

Current death row

- There are ten (10) individuals currently facing a sentence of death.
- Five (50%) are black; five (50%) are white.
- Nine cases involved a white victim; none involved a black victim.
- Every juror that convicted and sentenced the black defendants was white.

**Data compiled by Washington Death Penalty Assistance Center, May 2003.*