

Changes in the Profile of Minority Offenders

Statistics show a steady rise in the Canadian federal inmate population over the last six years. In 1984, there were an estimated 11,875 federal inmates in Canadian institutions. Five years later, the number had risen to 13,066 - an increase of more than 10%. Although there has been a rise in the total population of federal inmates, the racial composition of this population has not stayed the same, according to a series of Correctional Service of Canada Population Profile reports.

Caucasian inmates have been and continue to be the largest single racial group in Canadian federal correctional institutions and, in absolute numbers, they are continuing to grow. However, since 1984 there has been a decline in their representation relative to other racial groups. In 1984, Caucasians accounted for nearly 87% of the federal inmate population. In 1989, they had fallen to 84% - a decrease of 3%.

So who is accounting for the change in the Correctional Service of Canada's racial composition? As the "Racial Groups in the Correctional Service of Canada" chart shows, from 1984 to 1989, the number of North American Indians, Metis, Inuits, Asiatics and Blacks has climbed steadily. It is possible, of course, that the statistics reflect factors such as differences in the sentencing patterns among racial groups, in how soon they are released, and in how well they do after release. But even if such factors do play some role, it is doubtful that they can account for a five fold difference in the rates of increase between North American Indians and Caucasians. It seems more likely that minorities have actually experienced much more imprisonment in recent years than they did earlier.

Table 1

Race	1984	1989	Change
Caucasian	10,315	10,946	+6.1%
North American Indian	785	1,017	+29.6%
Metis	277	320	+15.5%
Inuit	22	54	+145.5%
Asiatic	65	88	+35.4%
Black	245	340	+38.8%
Other	166	301	+81.3%
Total	11,875	13,066	+10.0%

Recently, the Research Branch has initiated a project, in collaboration with the Department of Employment and Immigration, that will focus on the level of criminal activity of various ethnic and racial groups in Canada. While this culturespecific offender information can be examined to assess trends in ethnic crime, it also relates quite directly to our own questions concerning the cultural characteristics of the Correctional Service of Canada's offender population.

