

Ethnics Over Ethics: America's War On Drugs

Patrick Lauder III || Hillside Highschool

Introduction

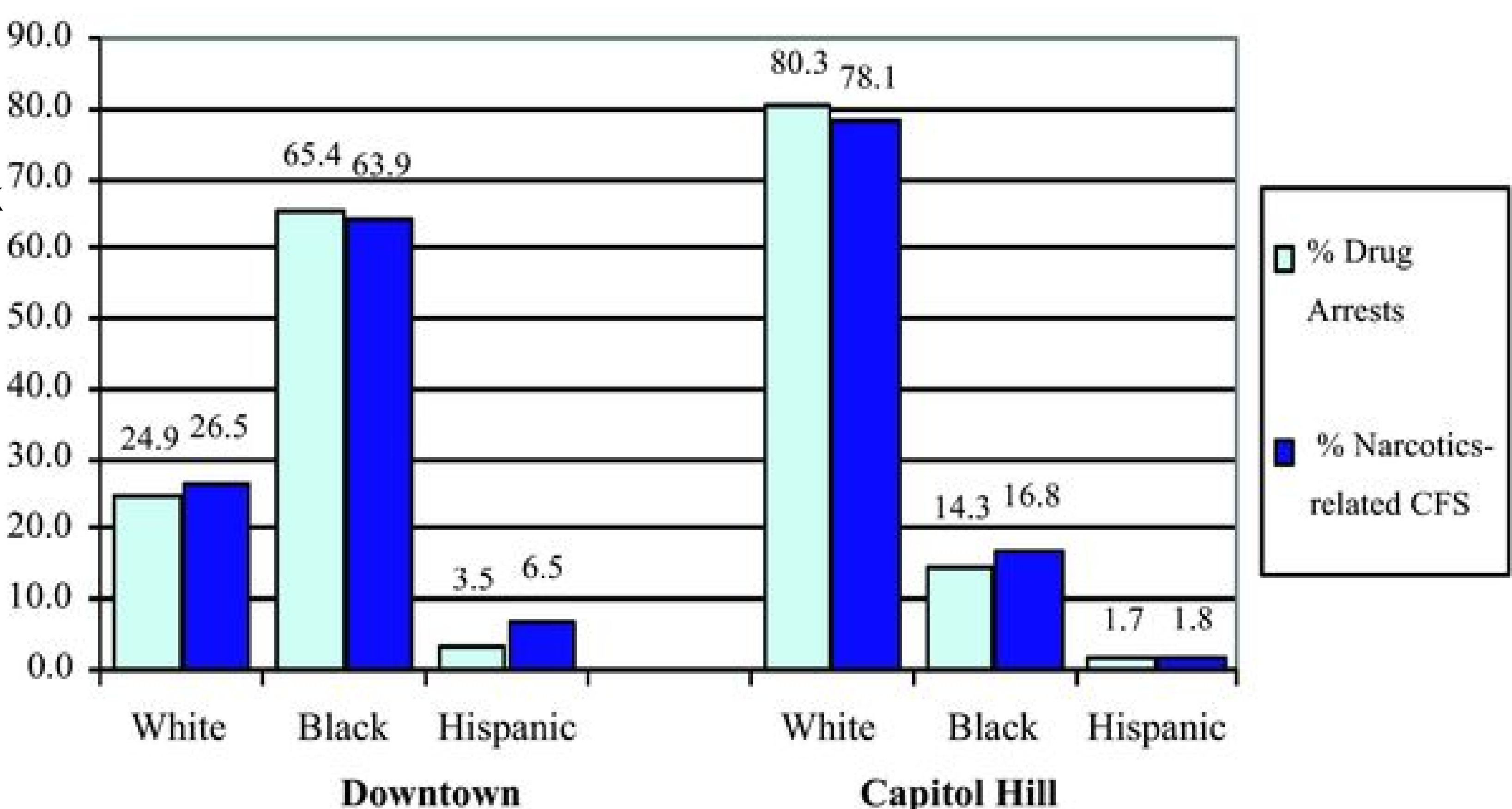
- Heroin is an opioid, a natural substance taken from the seed pod of various poppy plants.
- Heroin addiction became a prominent issue in the 1970s under President Richard Nixon. Heroin was a highly sought after drug for those who couldn't afford painkillers. As a result of the heroin addiction in America, Nixon began, "The War on Drugs," which disproportionately targeted poor, Black urban communities.
- As a result of the War on Drugs, possession of Heroin was further more treated as a relatively low class felony with one of the most severe punishments being a class C felony (up to 5 yrs. and/or up to \$50,000). In Alaska and the one of the least severe being a Class I felony, punishable by three to 12 months behind bars.
- The War on Drugs was a series of policies and initiatives in America dedicated to the prohibition of drugs and the criminalization of its abuse in American society.
- The war on drugs placed many citizens of color in prisons without the proper treatment to overcome their addiction.
- Due to the mass incarceration of individuals who suffer from heroin addiction and a lack of adequate treatment, many of these individuals have later relapsed into the condition.

Background Info

- There were a total of 496,900 black prisoners who met the criteria for drug dependence/abuse in 2004.
- Black Americans make up 13% of America's total population, but make up 40% of the total prison population.
- Whites are about 45% more likely than Blacks to sell drugs.
- Due to mandatory prison sentences, parents on average serve 15-20 years of prison time. This will lead to a rise of Black children who are left to be raised in single parent households.
- Blacks are less likely to be offered chances of probation based on drug charges than whites.
- 9 out of 10 people who are incarcerated for drug charges in New York are either Black or Latino.
- The Rockefeller Drug Laws (1970s) criminalized drug abuse and addiction, and as result of this the sentencing for drug related offenses were on par with the sentencing for murders.

Research Question

What are the racial disparities resulting between heroin and opioid usage from the 1970s through through the current year?



The graph below is a measurement of arrests taking place in Seattle of Washington State based on race and conviction, this graph demonstrates the disproportionate treatment of Black Americans during the War on Drugs.

Results

- Police generally target low-income minority areas to make a majority of their arrests involving drug possession
- As a result of the mass incarceration of blacks many are unable able to receive necessities for success like
 - Public housing assistance
 - Federal financial aid
 - Education tax credit
- As stated by presidential aid at the time John Ehrlichman, the true focus of America's War on Drugs was to criminalize America's black and hippie communities by US president Nixon in the 70s to secure his term as president

So in summary while I was unable to fully identify all of the racial disparities resulting between heroin and opioid usage from the 70s through current, I was still able to uncover info regarding America's War on Drugs which policies were heavily based around the criminalization of heroin and opioid use, mainly targeting black communities and minorities as a means of discrimination.

Methodology

In order to fully back up my claim I used data based on comparisons between the varying effects the War on Drugs had on individuals based off of race would be the best method to highlight the War on Drugs criminalization of blacks and other minority groups in America. I then used statistics from the 70s through the current year to analyze statistics based on: incarceration of races, treatment of those who were convicted of heroin and drug based charges, and drug policies. After comparing data from various sources, such as Bureau of Justice statistics (BJS) on drugs and its relations to crime as well as its details based on incarceration and drug facts from the National Institute of Health (NIH) and As a result of this I have gathered numerical data and documented evidence proving the War on Drug's detrimental effect on the black American community as well as its unnecessary discrimination against people of color.

Conclusion

I feel as if America's war on drugs was just another method of oppression against the black community used to criminalize the community and halt their progress along with many other minority groups as a whole. The War on Drugs while at first glance seems to have been formulated in response to the rapid growth of drug usage in America it only served to further break down the many American communities it was supposedly set out to help, bringing about as much harm as the drugs they meant to get rid of. Through this research I was hoping to compare the different treatments of individuals affected by the anti-drug policies implemented by the American government as well as the affect it held on its many citizens of color.