Lock Up, U.S.A.

America may be the land of freedom, but we also lock up more of our citizens than any other nation. That was not always the case. During the Great Depression and the four decades that followed, the incarceration rate hovered around 100 prisoners per 100,000 U.S. residents, dipping a bit during wars, when young men were drafted. Since 1985, however, the incarceration rate has risen five-fold, and the number of inmates has tripled. The increase is due primarily to tougher mandatory sentencing laws at both the federal and state levels and a quantum leap in the number of jailed drug offenders, who now account for one-quarter of the total prison population. Between 1974 and 2000, the number of state prisoners rose from 592,176 to 1,823,118.

Datagraphic By Lorraine Mofts

One Quarter of the World's Prison Population Is in the U.S.

In June 2008, there were an estimated 509,000 state and federal prisoners per 100,000 U.S. residents.