



SOCIAL BACKGROUNDS OF OKLAHOMA PRISONERS

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For every 100,000 persons in Oklahoma in 1934, fifteen or more years of age, 162 were committed to the state penitentiary. The commitment rate for Oklahoma during 1934 was approximately twice as high as for the United States as a whole. A consideration of the number of persons committed per 100,000 of the population over fourteen years of age according to race and nativity showed that negroes, with a commitment rate of 423, had by far the highest commitment rate. The commitment rates for Indians and Mexicans were 166 and 163, respectively. On the other hand, the rate for native born whites was 110 as compared to only 35 for foreign born whites. In other words, the commitment rate of native born whites was approximately three times as high as the commitment rate of foreign born whites. A study of the number of persons committed to state and federal prisons in 1934 by states showed wide variations in commitment rates. The index of measurement taken was the number committed per 100,000 of the general population in each state. On this basis, Maryland, Delaware, the District of Columbia, and Oklahoma committed respectively, 176, 170, 125, and 100 persons per 100,000 of the general population. At the other extreme, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, New York, and Massachusetts committed respectively only 19, 20, 24, and 24 persons per 100,000 of the general population.

However, states within the same region, sometimes even adjoining states showed wide variations in commitment rates. For example, while New Hampshire had a rate of only 19, Maryland had a rate of 176, and Pennsylvania only 20. The rate in Oklahoma, 100, was exactly twice as high as that of Texas. Persons born in other states who have migrated to Oklahoma had a slightly higher commitment rate than persons born in Oklahoma. Persons born in Virginia had the highest rate, with those born in Louisiana, South Carolina and New York ranking next in the order named.

A study of the age distribution of those committed to the Oklahoma penitentiary showed approximately one in ten under 21 years of age. Three in ten were from 21 to 26 years, and two in ten from 26 to 30 years. Three-fifths of the total were under 31 years, of age. The mean age of the 2,136 committed was 30.75 years. Thirty persons were over 60 years of age at the time of commitment. There was practically no difference in the commitment rate of the group under consideration according to marital status. This finding is in striking contrast to the figures for the country

as a whole. The commitment rate for single persons is nearly four times the rate for married persons. The rate for the widowed is approximately twice, and for divorced four times the rate of the married.

A study of the occupations of those committed showed that porters had a commitment rate of 493 persons for every 10,000 employed, followed by butchers with 350, cooks with 315, barbers with 398, and painters with 279. Other occupations having a rate of more than 200 for each 10,000 employed were plumbers, tailors and mechanics. Although farmers furnished the largest total number of prisoners, the rate per 10,000 farmers was only 39. Among the professional and business groups, musicians, with a rate of 106, ranked highest, followed by bankers, with 46, and clerks with 42. Teachers, with a rate of only 3.7, had the lowest commitment rate of any occupational group.

Over one-half of all those committed to state and federal prisons in 1934 were charged with one of the three gainful offenses of larceny, burglary and robbery. Oklahomans did even better in this respect than did the general average for the United States; exactly two-thirds of those committed in this state during the same year were committed for one of these three crimes. Larceny alone accounted for over one-third of all those committed by Oklahoma, and over one-fifth of those committed in the country as a whole. Burglary was the second most frequent offense, with slightly over one-fifth of those committed in Oklahoma as well as in the United States in general being committed for this offense. The average length of sentence (exclusive of those sentenced for life and to death) for the 2,136 persons committed for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1934, was 2.28 years. Over two-fifths of those committed to the penitentiary during the period under consideration had served one or more terms. Fifty-six per cent had no known prison record. One in four had served one previous term; one in ten, two previous terms; one in twenty, three previous terms; and one in twenty-five, four or more previous terms. One person had served ten previous terms.

