CHAPTER 39

Jails and Prisons*

PART I. JAILS

INTRODUCTION

There are few reports of any kind on a statewide basis prepared on jails. The lack of information in this area is due in large part to the difficulty in collecting it. There are only 13 States which have a State jail inspection service, a large percentage of these providing service in name only. In some States even the number and location of jails is unknown. With the exception of one Bureau of the Census report providing an age, sex, and race breakdown on jail inmates on April 1, 1960, there are little or no data available on the numbers or kinds of people confined in jails. Accurate statistical data can be tabulated for the most part only on an institution by institution basis and there are almost no resources available to accomplish this. If these difficulties were not enough, the tremendous variations in administration between jails makes it impossible to develop much data with valid comparability from jail to jail or State to State.

Because of the general limitations listed above, this study is based on questionnaires submitted by the Federal jail inspectors of the Federal Bureau of Prisons who are each responsible for geographic areas from 4 to 11 States, and from the few pieces of State-published data which was made available to us.

A. NATURE AND COMPOSITION OF JAILS

Jails are facilities for housing prisoners serving short sentences of usually less than a year, prisoners awaiting trial, hearing or grand jury action, and convicted offenders awaiting transfer to State correctional institutions. According to the 1960 census report mentioned above, there were on April 1, 1960, 119,992 inmates of local jails and workhouses. Of this total, 7,805 were female. With regard to age, approximately 600 were under 15 years old; about 12,500 were age 15 through 19; 21,000 were age 20 to 24; almost 17,000 were 25 through 29; over 42,000 were 30 through 44; and 26,000 were over 45 years old. As to racial breakdown, 74,000 were white and 46,000 nonwhite.

On an average day there are 3,000 to 3,500 pretrial Federal offenders held in local jails in the United States.

In one Midwestern State for which figures were available, almost 40 percent of those persons held in jails were for minor offenses such as vagrancy, drunkenness, disturbing the peace, and traffic offenses. In some cities in this State 96 percent of those held were for these

*Prepared by Federal Bureau of Prisons, Research and Statistics Branch, Department of Justice, with minor editing by committee staff.