

Troubling Trends in Arrests by Race in Melrose

Executive Summary:

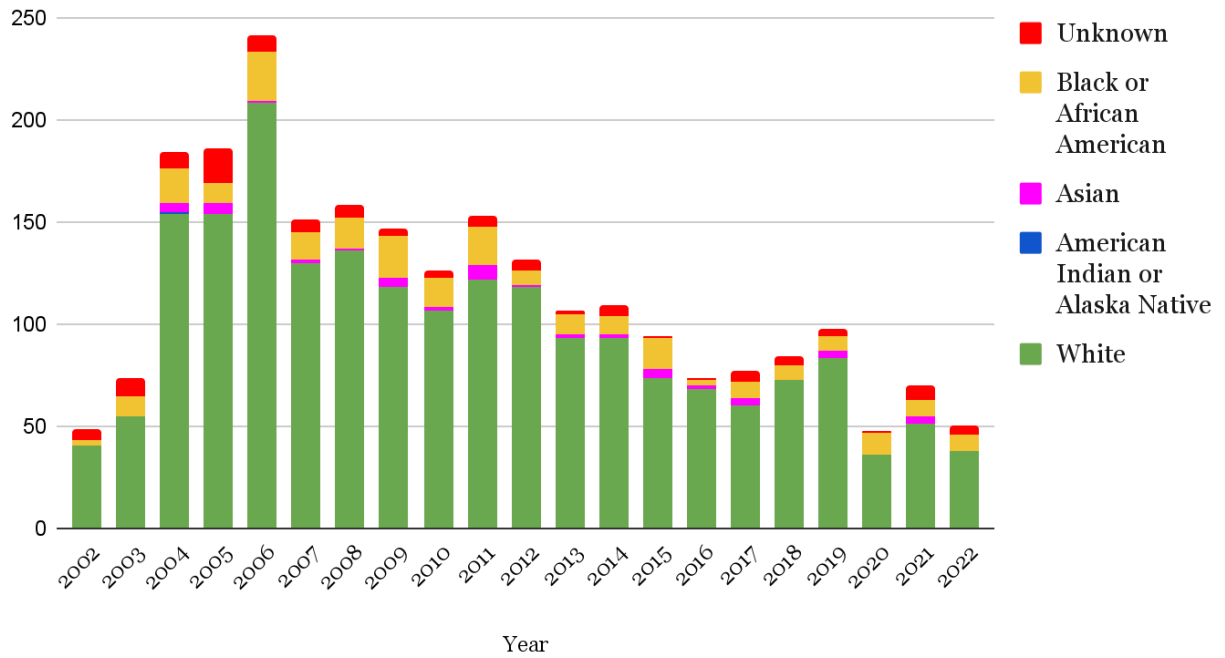
While the total number of arrests in Melrose are down over the past three years, the percent of arrest records involving Black individuals and individuals of unknown race have increased, and are above their annual average. The percent of Black individuals arrested in Melrose (10%) is well above the percent of Black residents in the Melrose population (3%).

Detailed arrest records by year for Melrose, including race, are available on the [Mass.gov website](#). As noted on the site “The Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS) collects National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) and Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) data from law enforcement agencies in accordance with the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reporting Program. The data is available to view and query in various formats and is utilized for various reports and to lead and guide policy decisions.” The records can be accessed from the “View detailed arrest information” data module on the [crime statistics](#) page. Once at that [page](#), select “Melrose” for Jurisdiction, “2022” for Year and “All” for Period and Offense Code, then click View Report. There is a disclaimer on the detailed arrest records: “The data in this report is NIBRS and only reflects data from agencies who have successfully submitted NIBRS data for the selected time period.”

For this analysis, detailed arrest information was downloaded for the years 2002-2022. No results were returned for searches in the years 1991-2001. The data for 2022 was based on a report executed on May 27, 2023.

The graph below shows the race information for each arrest record by year. The number of arrests in Melrose has fallen since 2006 and dropped substantially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic and the murder of George Floyd in 2020.

Arrests by Race in Melrose by Year

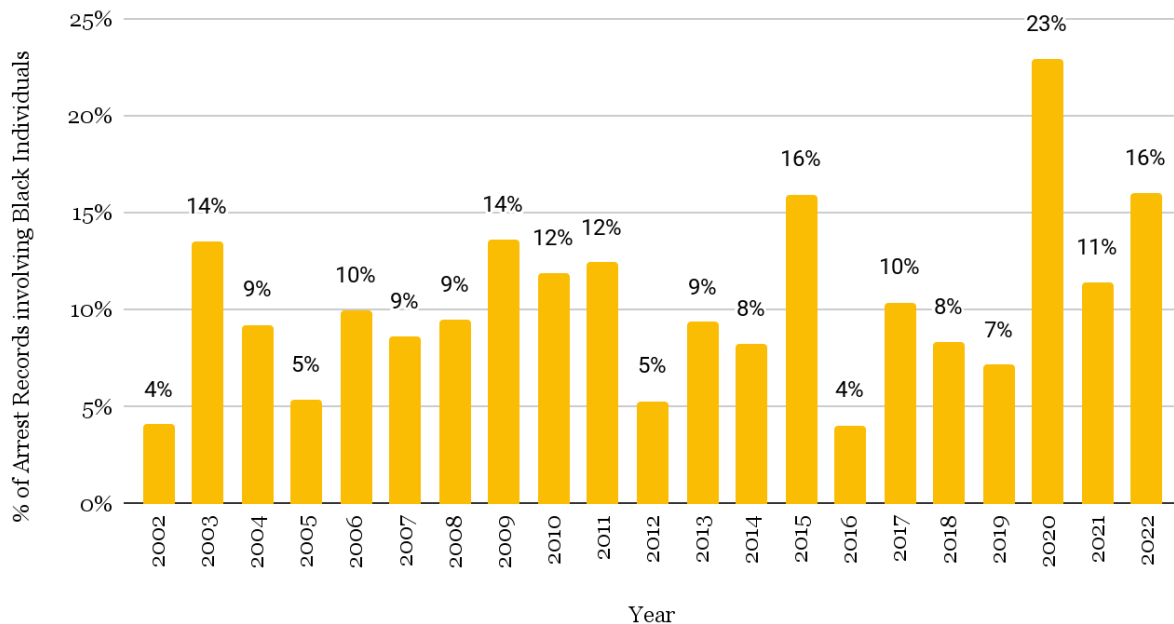


Arrests Records Involving Black Individuals

While the total number of arrest records reported to the state are lower for the past three years, the percent of arrests involving Black individuals has increased in that time. From 2002-2019 arrests records involving Black individuals comprised 9% of all arrests and from 2020-2022 they comprised 17%.

Across these 21 years of data, Black individuals were involved in 10% of arrests. For comparison, Black residents comprised 3.93% of the residential population of Melrose in 2010, and 3.34% in 2020, according to US Census Bureau data. So, the percent of arrests involving Black individuals (10%) is well above the percent of Black residents in the Melrose population.

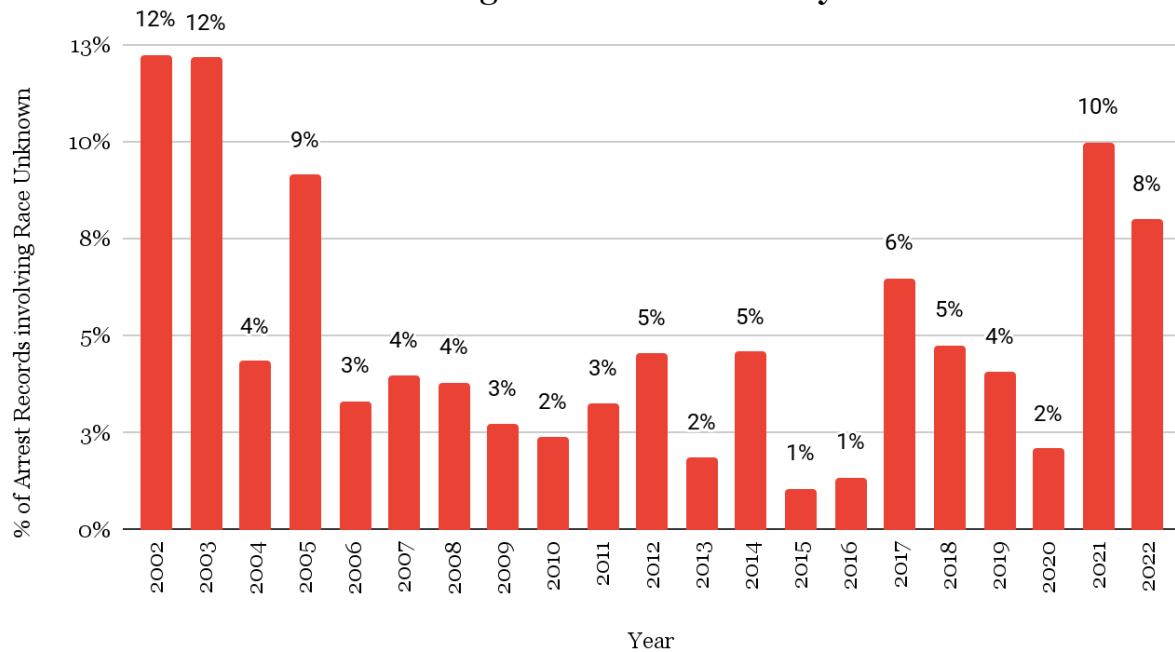
% of Arrest Records involving Black Individuals by Year



Arrests Records Involving “Race Unknown” Individuals

The percent of arrest records involving individuals whose race was reported as unknown has been above the 21-year average for the past two years (5%). Unknown arrests accounted for 10% in 2021 and 8% in 2022, approaching rates not seen in 15 years.

% of Arrest Records involving "Race Unknown" by Year



Implications:

On May 31, 2020, Mayor Brodeur, Police Chief Lyle and School Superintendent Taymore released this statement to the community:

Dear Melrose Community:

We are deeply saddened and outraged by the death of George Floyd. We grieve with his family, his friends, and his community as they try to make sense out of his brutal, indefensible death. We all would like to believe that such a tragedy would not occur in our country today. We want to believe that racism is part of our past but not our present or our future. We want to believe, but we cannot. The reality is that racism and inequality are facts of life in America. The reality is that there are men, women and children that do not feel safe in their own hometowns and in their own neighborhoods. And the reality is that nobody is safe until we are all safe.

We do not have all the answers, but we do know where to begin. We need to begin the hard and uncomfortable work necessary to confront our own implicit biases and our institutional biases. We need to have difficult conversations with ourselves, our family and friends, and those in the powerful positions who guard the status quo.

In the coming weeks, we will work together - city, schools, police, and community - to develop an action plan for the City of Melrose to confront this uncomfortable reality. In the meantime, we make this commitment. The Melrose Police Department will redouble its proven commitment to community policing and its protection of all our residents. The Melrose Public Schools will redouble its commitment to be a safe and welcoming environment for all our students. The City of Melrose will redouble its commitment to achieve its goal of being One Community Open to All.

We are only as strong as our most vulnerable, and it will take all of us, working together, to make things right and to live up to our ideals. Let's get to work.

Sincerely,

*Paul A. Brodeur
Mayor*

*Cyndy S. Taymore
Superintendent of Schools*

*Chief Michael L. Lyle
Melrose Police Department*

However, since this statement was released, the data show that in Melrose Black individuals have been arrested at a higher rate and race was not reported for a higher percentage of arrests. More information from the police department is needed to understand these outcomes. Are the decline in recorded arrests a result of a change in policing, or have fewer reports been submitted to the database? Is the increase of “unknown race” a change in policy, or an option used by specific personnel? Is the increase in “unknown race” arrests masking higher arrest rates for Black individuals? The option of “unknown race” makes it possible for police departments to avoid accountability for racial inequities in policing. The need remains to examine institutional biases and to have difficult conversations with those in powerful positions who guard the status quo.

Acknowledgements:

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