Power and Deviance

March 4, 2005

http://www.iastate.edu/~soc.134
Power and deviance

✓ Conflict perspective: defining and punishing deviance is form of social control by “haves” against “have-nots”
✓ “Have-nots” are more likely to be labeled and punished for crime
✓ Our legal system doesn’t protect us equally from the dangers to us from rich people and poor people
  • Reiman: Label “crime” refers not to actions that cause most misery and suffering, but primarily to dangerous actions of the poor
✓ Corporate crime: Estimated cost of white-collar crime (e.g., fraud, embezzlement) in 1997 was $338 billion (10,000 times amount stolen in bank robberies, 20 times thefts)
✓ Health care: “preventable medical errors” resulted in 98,000 deaths and 1 million injuries to hospitalized Americans and cost $29 billion
✓ Workplace safety: Reiman estimates over 30,000 annual deaths from occupational disease and hazard

# How are Americans murdered?

## How Americans Are Murdered

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total (weapon known)</th>
<th>Firearms</th>
<th>Knife or Other Cutting Instrument</th>
<th>Other Weapon: Club, Arson, Poison, Strangulation, etc.</th>
<th>Personal Weapon: Hands, Fists, etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>12,943</td>
<td>8,393</td>
<td>1,743</td>
<td>1,815</td>
<td>892</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## How Americans Are Really Murdered

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total (weapon known)</th>
<th>Occupational hazard &amp; disease</th>
<th>Knife or other cutting instrument including scalpel</th>
<th>Firearms</th>
<th>Other weapon: club, poison, strangulation, prescription drug, other medical treatment.</th>
<th>Personal weapon: hands, fists, etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>94,681</td>
<td>30,238</td>
<td>13,743</td>
<td>8,493</td>
<td>41,315</td>
<td>892</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jeffrey Reiman’s (2001) *The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison*
The war on drugs

African Americans have been disproportionately effected by the war on drugs
  • Blacks and whites use drugs at similar rates
  • Blacks are probably not more likely to sell drugs than whites
  • However, blacks are more likely to be arrested and spend more time in prison than whites

Why are blacks disproportionately punished?
  • Social organization of drug use in inner city vs. suburbs
  • Disproportionate sentencing (e.g., 100-to-1 rule)
  • Blacks are targeted by law enforcement (e.g., racial profiling)

Historically, U.S. drug laws have been linked to race and class
Three profile stop studies

✓ Illinois’ Project Valkyrie (1987-97)
  ✓ Latinos < 8% of IL population; 27% of searches
  ✓ Blacks < 15% of IL population; 23% of searches
  ✓ Cops ask to search Latinos’ cars more than whites’, but find lower % of contraband

✓ Maryland State Police (1995-96)
  ✓ Blacks make up 16.9% of drivers on I-95 & 17.5% of traffic violators, but account for 72.9% of searches
  ✓ Whites: drivers, 75.6%; violators, 74.4%; searches, 19.7%

✓ New Jersey (1999)
  ✓ Blacks & Latinos: 13.5 % of drivers, 77% of searches
Scapegoating the young

- Violent crime
  - Teenagers commit just 13% of violent crime
  - They are more likely to be victims than offenders

- Drug use
  - Most drug users are adults, but teenagers are more likely to be arrested

- Results of scapegoating teenagers
  - Status offenses that apply only to young
  - Constitutional rights of young ignored
  - Youth culture targeted for censorship
  - Youths given harsher punishments than adults
  - Offenders against children receive lenient sentences

Source: Mike A. Males’ The Scapegoat Generation