

Race and Crime: An International Dilemma

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In their magisterial *Crime and Human Nature*, J.Q. Wilson and R.J. Herrnstein noted that the Asian underrepresentation in U.S. crime statistics posed a theoretical problem. The solution proposed by criminologists as early as the 1920s was that the Asian "ghetto" protected members from the disruptive tendencies of the outside society. For blacks, however, the ghetto is said to foster crime.

The overrepresentation of blacks in U.S. crime statistics has existed since the turn of the twentieth century. The census of 1910 showed more blacks than whites in jail, in the north as well as in the south. Official figures from the 1930s through the 1950s showed that the number of blacks arrested for crimes of violence in proportion to the number of whites ranged from 6:1 to 16:1. These statistics have not improved in the interim.

Breaching a long taboo, liberals from Bill Clinton to Jesse Jackson have recently made it respectable to theorize about "black-on-black" crime. Conservative magazines like the *National Review* have also begun to discuss aspects of the race/crime link (see "Blacks...and Crime," May 16, 1994; "How to Cut Crime," May 30, 1994). What is yet to be acknowledged, however, is the international generalizability of the race/crime relationship. The matrix found within the United States, with Asians being most law-abiding, Africans least, and Europeans intermediate, is to be observed in other multiracial countries like Britain, Brazil, and Canada. Moreover, the pattern is revealed

in China and the Pacific Rim, Europe and the Middle East, and Africa and the Caribbean. Because the "American dilemma" is global in manifestation, explanations must go well beyond U.S. particulars.

I emphasize at the outset that enormous variability exists within each of the populations on many of the traits to be discussed. Because distributions substantially overlap, with average differences amounting to between 4 and 34 percent, it is highly problematic to generalize from a group average to a particular individual. Nonetheless, as I hope to show, significant racial variation exists, not only in crime but also in other traits that predispose to crime, including testosterone, brain size, temperament, and cognitive ability.

The global nature of the racial pattern in crime is shown in data collated from INTERPOL using the 1984 and 1986 yearbooks. After analyzing information on nearly 100 countries, I reported, in the 1990 issue of the *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, that African and Caribbean countries had double the rate of violent crime (an aggregate of murder, rape, and serious assault) than did European countries, and three times more than did countries in the Pacific Rim. Averaging over the three crimes and two time periods, the figures per 100,000 population were, respectively, 142, 74, and 43.

I have corroborated these results using the most recent INTERPOL yearbook (1990). The rates of murder, rape, and serious assault per 100,000 population reported for 23 predominantly African countries, 41

Caucasian countries, and 12 Asian countries were: for murder, 13, 5, and 3; for rape, 17, 6, and 3; and for serious assault, 213, 63, and 27. Summing the crimes gave figures per 100,000, respectively, of 243, 74, and 33. The gradient remained robust over contrasts of racially homogeneous countries in northeast Asia, central Europe, and sub-Saharan Africa, or of racially mixed but predominantly black or white/Amerindian countries in the Caribbean and Central America. In short, a stubborn pattern exists worldwide that requires explanation.

Testosterone and the Family

The breakdown of the black family and the strengths of the Asian family are often used to explain the crime pattern within the United States. Learning to follow rules is thought to depend on family socialization. Since the 1965 Moynihan Report documented the high rates of marital dissolution, frequent heading of families by women, and numerous illegitimate births, the figures cited as evidence for the instability of the black family in America have tripled.

A similarly constituted matrifocal black family exists in the Caribbean with father-absent households, lack of paternal certainty, and separate bookkeeping by spouses. The Caribbean pattern, like the American one, is typically attributed to the long legacy of slavery. However, the slavery hypothesis does not fit data from sub-Saharan Africa. After reviewing long-standing African marriage systems in the 1989 issue of *Ethology and Sociobiology*, anthropologist Patricia Draper of Pennsylvania State University concluded: "coupled with low investment parenting is a mating pattern that permits early sexual activity, loose economic and emotional ties between spouses...and in many cases the expectation on the part of both spouses that the marriage will end in divorce or separation, followed by the formation of another union."

The African marriage system may partly depend on traits of temperament. Biological variables such as the sex hormone testosterone are implicated in the tendency toward multiple relationships as well as the tendency to commit crime. One study, published in the 1993 issue of *Criminology* by Alan Booth and D. Wayne Osgood, showed clear evidence of a testosterone-crime link based on an analysis of 4,462 U.S. military personnel. Other studies have linked testosterone to an aggressive and impulsive personality, to a lack of empathy, and to sexual behavior. Testosterone levels explain why young men are disproportionately represented in crime statistics relative to young women, and why younger people are more trouble-prone than

older people. Testosterone reliably differentiates the sexes and is known to decline with age.

Ethnic differences exist in average level of testosterone. Studies show 3 to 19 percent more testosterone in black college students and military veterans than in their white counterparts. Studies among the Japanese show a correspondingly lower amount of testosterone than among white Americans. Medical research has focused on cancer of the prostate, one determinant of which is testosterone. Black men have higher rates of prostate cancer than do white men who in turn have higher rates than do Oriental men.

Sex hormones also influence reproductive physiology. Whereas the average woman produces 1 egg every 28 days in the middle of the menstrual cycle, some women have shorter cycles and others produce more than one egg; both events translate into greater fecundity including the birth of dizygotic (two-egg) twins. Black women average shorter menstrual cycles than white women and produce a greater frequency of dizygotic twins. The rate per 1,000 births is less than 4 among east Asians, 8 among whites, and 16 or greater among Africans and African-Americans.

Racial differences exist in sexual behavior, as documented by numerous surveys including those carried out by the World Health Organization. Africans, African-Americans and blacks living in Britain are more sexually active, at an earlier age, and with more sexual partners than are Europeans and white Americans, who in turn are more sexually active, at an earlier age, and with more sexual partners than are Asians, Asian-Americans, and Asians living in Britain. Differences in sexual activity translate into consequences. Teenage fertility rates around the world show the racial gradient, as does the pattern of sexually transmitted diseases. World Health Organization Technical Reports and other studies examining the worldwide prevalence of AIDS, syphilis, gonorrhea, herpes, and chlamydia typically find low levels in China and Japan and high levels in Africa, with European countries intermediate. This is also the pattern found within the United States.

International data on personality and temperament show that blacks are less restrained and less quiescent than whites and whites are less restrained and less quiescent than Orientals. With infants and young children observer ratings are the main method employed, whereas with adults the use of standardized tests are more frequent. One study in French-language Quebec examined 825 four- to six-year olds from 66 countries rated by 50 teachers. All the children were in preschool French-language immersion classes for immigrant