

Dr. J. Foster - [unclear]

Dear Dave -

I know that some distortion by the transmission channel (the press) has to be allowed for, but I was a little surprised at the one-sidedness of this account.

For sake of argument I could accept the "social theory" of causation of crime - though we still have to account for the fact that not every ghetto-born responds in the same way to a presumably pathogenic environment. So that other variables surely also play a role.

The fact is that we have a serious problem today, and as with many other grave outcomes, we have to consider therapies to limit the damage. Neither the law nor the psychologists can do very much in one generation to reach the fundamental causes - no more than the virologist can undo the loss of hearing that a deaf infant has suffered from pre-natal rubella. Of course we have to develop the vaccine; but we cannot ignore the children who are already deaf and who can be "rehabilitated".

I agree with you about the shortcomings of the "medical model" of the "hardened" criminal. But what do we do then about the convicted offender?

Before chiding the psychologists about the futility of their efforts you had better come up with better answers than we have heard so far.

The most rational policy (in theory) that I have heard of was transportation, which convicted convicts into exile and then provinces. We have, alas, no New South Wales of the kind today.

Meanwhile, this kind of news story does little service by confusing the basic issues and the short-term responses to crime. I have no great faith in deterrence, but its complete abrogation is unlikely to improve the system - a dog you think otherwise. And if there is not some credible response to violent crime by the legal system, more and more of our citizens will (and more and more rationally) take the law in their own hands in "self-defense".

Did you mean that psychologists should stay out of the problem of crime altogether? Or that they should pay more attention to determining just what aspects of the social milieu are the most dangerous in eliciting crime. "Poverty" is not a very convincing answer. It just does not correlate very well with the incidence of crime in a historical or cross-cultural context. I grant you that abolishing poverty would go a long way to reducing crime; but this is a bit tautological. Crime is not only a consequence of, but is a small measure also a cause of social disorganization and poverty.