

Realities of Criminology and Criminal Justice

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By

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PREFACE

Synopsis

“Realities of Criminology and Criminal Justice” tells the story of 25 more facts about crime and criminal justice that I learned in my quarter century of working in the field. Like its predecessor, “Lessons in Criminology and Criminal Justice,” the book lays out each fact, one at a time, and then presents the research in support of that fact. The book is scholarly in nature but it is written for the layperson and introductory student. I use humor where appropriate, but I also simply “tell it like it is” by simply presenting the facts. The book is captivating and attention-grabbing. The book is interesting, occasionally funny, timely, and engaging.

Contents

Here are the 25 facts to be discussed in the book—each in its own chapter—with a brief summary of the argument to be made regarding each:

Lesson #1: Serious crimes are the ones that supposedly happen the most frequently and cause the most harm.

The federal government—specifically the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)—defines crimes as serious based on the idea that they happen most frequently and cause the most harm in society. This makes sense and matches our perceptions of crime from media coverage of it. Yet, data show that there are other acts that occur more frequently and cause more harm than serious crime. Many countries, including the United States, generally do not criminalize such acts, and even in cases where they do, the law is generally not enforced.

Lesson #2. “Race” is a human invention socially constructed by the powerful, yet it has significant impacts on the real world.

“Whiteness” was invented in the US in the 1600s to begin a process of differentiating people based on skin color for reasons related to power. The concept of race as a way to separate people by skin color into different

groups is not a biological reality but is rather a social construction; in this way, race was invented by Whites to assure their continued hold on power in the United States. Yet, even though race was invented, it nevertheless has significant impacts on the real world including in terms of how people are treated by the criminal justice system. Outcomes of race are identified and discussed in this chapter.

Lesson #3. Murder is very rare relative to the size of the population.

Murder is the most serious crime in most societies and it is likely one of the most feared crimes by Americans. It is also one of the most covered stories in the news media. For example, one study showed that 26 percent of news stories were focused on murder, even though murder regularly accounts for only a tiny fraction of one percent of all crimes known to the police (Paulsen, 2000). Another study of crime reporting in one city over a one-year period found that a major, regional newspaper and a TV news station both disproportionately focused on violent crime, with homicide in particular. The study found that the newspaper covered on its front page about one major crime story every three days. Violent offenses made up 80% of the stories and 61% dealt with homicide (O'Hear, 2020)!

Lesson #4. Most crimes are not known to the police.

The measure of crimes known to the police is known as the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR); it includes crimes reported to as well as discovered by the police. Another measure of crime, the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), contains data on criminal victimizations reported to researchers as part of a household survey. A comparison of the two datasets shows that most crimes are not known to the police, meaning they are not reported to them or discovered by them.

Lesson #5. Crime is predictable.

Criminologists have done an admirable job examining crime and discovering what makes it happen. Research has demonstrated that certain factors tend to cluster or correlate with criminal victimization. This chapter discusses this issue and illustrates the types of things that tend to produce crime.

Lesson #6. There is no such thing as a non-criminal.

Although criminological theories like to differentiate between criminals and non-criminals (i.e., criminals have been exposed to the things that cause

crime and non-criminals have not), there is actually no such thing as a non-criminal; studies show that nearly everyone admits to breaking the law. Why this matters for disciplines such as criminology is examined in this chapter.

Lesson #7. The best crime prevention is personal.

There are all kinds of crime prevention programs and techniques in existence; many of these are carried out by government. But research shows that the best type of crime prevention is personal; that is, we are best capable of protecting ourselves from criminal victimization. This chapter demonstrates this reality with examples.

Lesson #8. Situational crime prevention works.

Situational crime prevention is a type of crime prevention that does not require explaining or understanding why people commit crime. Instead, it aims to change the physical environment in which crime occurs in order to stop it from happening. This chapter outlines and defines forms of situational crime prevention and provides real-life examples to show how effective it is at crime prevention.

Lesson #9. Most drug use is not drug abuse.

Most people use some form of drug, whether it be caffeine or nicotine or alcohol or even an illicit drug. And most people use the drug in such a way that it is recreational and/or even beneficial to their lives (Abadinsky, 2017; Maisto, Galizio, & Connors, 2014). Chronic, habitual, persistent, disruptive, and harmful drug use (i.e., drug abuse) is thankfully much rarer. This is because most people who use drugs do not go on to become abusers. Using actual data on drug use and abuse, this chapter shows how rare drug abuse is relative to drug use.

Lesson #10. DARE didn't work.

Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) was once popular across the United States and at one time was the most funded crime prevention program in the country. Yet, it turns out that the program not only did not work to reduce drug use, but may have caused real harms to many of those exposed to it. This chapter summarizes the evidence on the (in)effectiveness of DARE and turns to other approaches that are more likely to work to reduce drug use.

Lesson #11. College education in police officers is rare.

Most police officers in the United States do not have a college education. This chapter illustrates how rare college education is among officers and then discusses why college education should be required for officers.

Lesson #12. Smart policing works.

Traditional policing seeks out criminal offenders with the goal of arresting them. As such, much policing is reactive in nature, and this type of policing is shown through research to be highly ineffective. Conversely, so-called “smart policing” is more proactive in nature and aims to prevent crime before it happens. Summarizing the available evidence on different forms of smart policing, this chapter demonstrates what works in policing to reduce crime.

Lesson #13. Use of force by the police is rare.

Excessive use of force by the police is one of the most troubling aspects of criminal justice. It often appears in the news media and tends to shock those of us who are exposed to it. Yet, the good news is that excessive use of police force is actually quite rare, relative to the number of encounters that people have with the police. This is largely because any use of force by the police is also quite rare. Using real-world data, this chapter demonstrates just how rare use of force and excessive use of police force are.

Lesson #14. The group most victimized by police violence is native populations.

There is an understandable stereotype that the group most likely to be victimized by police violence is African Americans, and especially African American men. Yet, this chapter shows that the data actually show that the group with the highest rates of police victimization are native populations (e.g., Native Americans). Implications for justice are discussed.

Lesson #15. Biases do exist in policing.

It is certainly a fair conclusion that most police are not racist or classist or biased against any other group in society. Yet, there is evidence of police biases in some places, times, and situations. This “contextual discrimination” is the focus on this chapter; evidence about where and when police biases occur is presented (chapter 21 discusses contextual discrimination in courts).

Lesson #16. Prosecutors have the burden of proof.

When people are arrested for alleged crimes, we often see them as guilty, largely because preliminary evidence of their guilt is often reported in the news media (Robinson, 2023b). Yet, individuals have the presumption of innocence, meaning they are innocent until proven guilty in a court of law. This chapter discusses the burden that prosecutors have in the courts to prove a person guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. The chapter shows how prosecutors use their power to typically get out of having to prove this burden by pursuing plea bargains rather than criminal trials.

Lesson # 17. A person can be tried twice for the same offense.

We all likely know about double jeopardy, the idea that you cannot be tried twice for the same offense. But, in fact, a person can be tried twice for the same offense, as long as each trial is in a separate jurisdiction. For example, a person can be tried at the state and federal level for the same crime. Using a real-life example, this chapter demonstrates how a person can be tried twice for the same alleged crime.

Lesson #18. Judges serve multiple roles in the courts.

Though we tend to see judges as neutral referees who balance the interests of the defendant and the government (i.e., the prosecutor) in criminal trials, judges actually serve many more roles than just the adjudicator. This chapter identifies and defines all of the roles served by judges in the court system.

Lesson #19. Wrongful conviction is more common than you think.

Cases of wrongful conviction often make the news, especially when they are particularly heinous or outrageous. But, wrongful conviction occurs far more frequently than people likely know. This chapter gives estimates from research about how common wrongful conviction is and provides a real-life example of a case that led to a wrongful conviction, including even a wrongful execution.

Lesson #20. Criminal sentences are mostly determined by legal factors.

Though there is “contextual discrimination” in the courts (i.e., biases that occur in some places, times, and situations—see Lesson #21), criminal sentences are, for the most part, determined by legal factors and are thus fair (Grunwald, 2015). This chapter illustrates that the best predictors of criminal punishment are things such as the seriousness of the offense and

the prior record of the defendant (Ostrom, Ostrom, & Kleiman, 2004). In this way, punishment is proportionate to the crime (Schneider, 2012) and tends to be consistent with the Eighth Amendment to the US Constitution (Torti, 2013). Though this is celebrated by most, for it means there is little evidence of overt discrimination in the courts, the fact that legal factors tend to predict sentences means that biases in the law (and potentially policing) do impact sentencing outcomes. This chapter outlines all the evidence that this is true.

Lesson #21. Some biases do exist in courts.

This chapter summarizes the available evidence about “contextual discrimination” in courts. Evidence is examined and presented with regard to biases in the pre-trial, trial, and post-trial portions of the court system. Implications for justice are discussed.

Lesson #22. Most forms of punishment fail, but some punishments work.

Ask any criminologist and they will likely tell you that the criminal justice system is a failure when it comes to reducing crime. This is not to say that the system has no impact on crime and crime rates, but rather would be an acknowledgement that most forms of punishment are found to fail at reducing repeat offending, or recidivism. This chapter summarizes evidence related to this claim and ends with an examination of types of punishment that are found to work.

Lesson #23. Mass imprisonment occurred due to politics.

The United States witnessed an explosion in imprisonment rates from 1973 until about 2008 that was unprecedented both in US and world history. Yet, the increased number of people incarcerated had little to do with crime; after all, it was not in response to some major increase in crime within society. Instead, the huge increases in imprisonment were due to politics. This chapter will show the factors involved at both the state and federal level that led to America’s imprisonment increases.

Lesson #24. Prisons and jails are not the same thing.

Listen to (especially the local) news and you will regularly hear about cases of people facing years of incarceration for accused crimes. Oftentimes, reporters will claim that people will be incarcerated for years in jail should be they be convicted. Yet, this is not possible because jails are intended for

people to be incarcerated for no more than one year. This chapter explains the important differences between jail and prison.

Lesson #25. Informal social control is more effective than formal social control; this is why criminal justice practices do not have a large effect on crime.

Informal social control is the type of crime prevention that happens naturally by people living their normal lives. It involves groups such as parents, teachers, and religious leaders teaching young people right from wrong, rewarding good behavior, and punishing or correcting bad behavior. Conversely, formal social control is carried out by the government and involves things such as police arresting alleged offenders, courts trying them, and corrections punishing the guilty. This chapter shows that informal social control is more effective than formal social control, and outlines the implications for criminal justice in the process.

Contribution to the Field

“More Lessons in Criminology and Criminal Justice” contributes to the knowledge in Criminology and Criminal Justice by briefly summarizing what is known in several areas, including crime, policing, courts, and corrections. The book is a follow-up to “Lessons in Criminology and Criminal Justice”; collectively, the author has presented and analyzed 50 key facts from the field. The book will be a vital resource for the introductory student as well as the lay person who wants to quickly locate important facts of crime and justice. Further, the perspective of the book is unlike any other book on the market, as the author analyzes important issues such as the human invention of race, biases in policing and courts, police use of force, effective policing and corrections, and more. The book does not shy away from potentially controversial topics such as these, and is not afraid to make claims that some may find controversial, even though each is rooted in hard facts.

CHAPTER 1

LESSON #1:

SERIOUS CRIMES ARE THE ONES THAT SUPPOSEDLY HAPPEN THE MOST FREQUENTLY AND CAUSE THE MOST HARM

The federal government—specifically the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)—defines crimes as serious based on the idea that they happen most frequently and cause the most harm in society. This makes sense and matches our perceptions of crime from media coverage of it. Yet, data show that there are other acts that occur more frequently and cause more harm than serious crime. Many countries, including the United States, generally do not criminalize such acts, and even in cases where they do, the law is generally not enforced.

Each year, the FBI compiles crime data from police departments all over the United States to produce its report, *Crime in the United States*. One of the key features of the report is its presentation of data with regard to the crimes it calls the most serious—the Part One Index Offenses. They include four violent crimes (murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault) and four property crimes (theft, motor vehicle theft, burglary, and arson). These are the crimes that were originally thought to be the most likely reported by citizens to the police based on their frequency and the amount of harm they cause—i.e., they are supposedly the most frequent and harmful criminal acts in the United States (Robinson, 2020).

Table 1.1 shows data from the FBI's UCR from 2019. As you can see, property crime is more common than violent crime. The most common crime is theft. And the most common violent crime is aggravated assault.

Table 1.1. Crimes Known to the Police (2019), Uniform Crime Reports

Population	328,239,523
Violent crime	1,203,808
Murder	16,425
Rape	139,815
Robbery	267,988
Aggravated assault	821,182
Property crime	6,925,677
Burglary	1,117,696
Theft	5,086,096
Motor vehicle theft	721,885

Source of data: <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/tables/table-1>

One can calculate a rate of victimization by dividing the number of crimes within each category. These results are shown in Table 1.2, expressed as a percentage of the population who was victimized by each type of crime. As you can see, the only specific crime for which even one percent of people were victimized by it was theft (and property crime overall).

Table 1.2 Percentage of Americans Victimized by Street Crimes (2019), Uniform Crime Reports

Population	328,239,523
Violent crime	0.37%
Murder	0.005%
Rape	0.042%
Robbery	0.082%
Aggravated assault	0.25%

Property crime	2.11%
Burglary	0.34%
Theft	1.55%
Motor vehicle theft	0.22%

Source of data: <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/tables/table-1>

The point of these data is that crime is relatively rare in the United States. The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) tends to show higher numbers and rates of victimization, since it includes crimes both reported to the police and crimes not reported to the police) (see Lesson #4). For example, NCVS data from 2021 show that about 3.5% of Americans were victimized by property crime and 1.4% by violent crime (Thompson & Tapp, 2022). So, even according to the NCVS, crime is very rare in the US. And how much does all this crime cost us? According to the FBI (2023), the direct losses of all property crimes were \$15.8 billion in 2019. Though this figure does not include the losses for violent crime and does not include indirect costs, it gives us a rough idea of how costly street crime is in the US.

We have been told that these crimes are the most serious in the country. From that, we can assume they are the most harmful and the most frequently occurring, since that is the definition of serious crime. But it turns out, this is not true! As noted by Robinson (2023), rich people typically do not commit street crimes like those listed in the table; nevertheless, “Rich people are more dangerous than poor people.” This is true for the simple reason that it tends to be the wealthy who commit acts of white-collar and corporate crimes, which, according to Robinson (2023), cost Americans more than \$1 trillion each year through various forms of fraud! Defective products alone cost us that much, although this number includes indirect costs, as well (Consumer Product Safety Commission, 2022).

Acts of elite deviance—unethical and harmful behaviors committed by the powerful—also injure and kill more people than all street crimes combined (Simon, 2018)! Robinson (2023), for example, shows the following number

of deaths for various acts that involve culpability (i.e., moral and legal responsibility) by elites:

• Tobacco	480,000
• Unhealthy foods	395,000
• Medical treatment and infection	325,000
• Poverty and income inequality	291,000
• Hospital error	250,000
• Adverse reactions to prescriptions	100,000
• Air pollution	55,000
• Occupational disease and injury	54,000
• Lack of health insurance	45,000
• Defective products	20,000

These acts are clearly *not* the same thing as crime, but an analysis of how they happen and who is responsible for them shows that these acts are not as different from crime as you may believe. For example, there is culpability (i.e., moral and legal responsibility) by elites for the acts above (Simon, 2018). And the point of the numbers is to show that, though serious crimes are the ones that supposedly happen the most frequently and cause the most harm, this is actually not true.

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CHAPTER 2

LESSON #2.

“RACE” IS A HUMAN INVENTION SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED BY THE POWERFUL, YET IT HAS SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS ON THE REAL WORLD

“Whiteness” was invented in the US in the 1600s to begin a process of differentiating people based on skin color for reasons related to power. The concept of race as a way to separate people by skin color into different groups is not a biological reality but is rather a social construction; in this way, race was invented by Whites to assure their continued hold on power in the United States. Yet, even though race was invented, it nevertheless has significant impacts on the real world including in terms of how people are treated by the criminal justice system. Outcomes of race are identified and discussed in this chapter.

According to Robinson (2022), race (when it comes to skin color) is not a biological reality (also see Templeton, 2013). Instead, the concept of race was invented and the “intersection of race and class did not simply happen. It was made to happen” (Cell, 1982: 17). Cell (1982: 16) notes that race is a political process “rooted in the specific power relations of the particular societies where peoples meet, live, work, fight, and propagate ... the species. ... the concept of race reflects the interaction of dominant and subjected groups throughout history.” According to Cell (1982: 17), “there is no race consciousness” in places and times where only one like group of people exists and thus “race does not exist. Only when racially conscious groups collide, with one rationalizing its dominance while the other strives to maintain its identity and integrity, does race become a social and historical factor.”

Racial formation theorists show how racial categories are created and assigned by people in power in the first place (Omi & Winant, 1986, 1994;

Winant, 1994). Omi and Winant (1994: 55) define racial formation as “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and [ultimately] destroyed.” Race, though invented, does ultimately become means of organizing both individual behavior and social life. As noted by Bonilla-Silva (1997: 471): “Historically the classification of a people in racial terms has been a highly political act associated with practices such as conquest and colonialization, enslavement, peonage, indentured servitude, and, more recently, colonial and neocolonial labor immigration.” For example, the term “Indian” was created in the sixteenth century and the term “Negro” in the seventeenth century “to justify the conquest and exploitation of various peoples” (Bonilla-Silva, 1997: 471). In this process, since “Indians” were depicted as savages, it means Europeans were civilized; since “Negroes” were slaves, Whites were meant to be free. Race is thus not a natural, biological category but instead an invented, socially constructed one.

Importantly, once “the process of attaching meaning to a ‘people’ is instituted, race becomes a real category of group association and identity” that actually begins to have meaning and real impacts on society and groups within (Bonilla-Silva, 1997: 471). Moreover, societal institutions—political, economic, educational, social, become competitive of “us versus them,” creating further potential conflicts. Interestingly, the concept of race itself appears to be heavily dependent on economic interests. For example, Bonilla-Silva (1997: 473) writes: “The placement of groups of people in racial categories stemmed initially from the interests of powerful actors in the social system (e.g., the capitalist class, the planter class, colonizers).” For example, Bonilla-Silva (1997: 473) notes that “racialized social orders emerged after the imperialist expansion of Europe to the New World and Africa.” It was, of course, people who came to identify as Whites who colonized what would become the United States and much of the world, and people they designated as Blacks who suffered from it, along with other people of color.

Ideas related to what would become “race” began to impact North American life a century prior to the founding of the United States. For example, Roediger (2021) shows how the increased need for labor in the 1600s changed the nature of indentured servitude from temporary to permanent,

and from multicultural (i.e., European, Native American, and Black) to exclusively Black. Further, Bacon's Rebellion (1676) resulted in privileges being given to European workers over Blacks, "ensuring divisions between the lower classes and laying the racist foundations for class that still divide us" (Cruz, 2017). Smedley (2007) called this rebellion "the first major threat to social stability" as it involved thousands of poor workers, potentially disrupting the steady supply of workers to plantation owners. Colony rulers, all land owners and planters, "began to pass a series of laws separating out Africans and their descendants, restricting their rights and mobility, and imposing a condition of permanent slavery on them" (Smedley, 2007). These were based largely on physical characteristics of the population, including skin color: "In this period, hundreds of laws were passed restricting the rights of Africans and their descendants" (Smedley, 2007). One such law, in 1691, prohibited the marriage of Europeans to other groups, and this was the first time the term "White" appeared in public record (Smedley, 2007). In the state of Virginia, laws made slavery hereditary and based on the status of the mother rather than the father (1662) and it became legal to maintain slaves even when they had converted to Christianity (1667). All of these developments served to make race more real (Roediger, 2021).

The concept of race became institutionalized in the early 1700s during a time in North America when there was an increased need for labor that would come in the form of slavery (Smedley, 1997, 1999, 2007). Roediger (2021) writes: "By the mid-1700s, new laws and societal norms linked Africans to perpetual labor, and the American colonies made formal social distinctions among its people based on appearance, place of origin, and heredity." To settle the contradictions of slavery with European beliefs of liberty, equality, human rights, democracy and similar concepts related to justice, it was necessary to dehumanize slaves—i.e., Blacks—and this occurred through numerous means. One was religious, based on the idea that Blacks were heathens in need of saving. Curran (2020) writes: "The logic behind the history of race initially seems deceptively clear: to justify the forced deportation of 400,000 Black Africans to North America (and another eleven million to other parts of the Americas between 1525 and 1866), Europeans and their American heirs found it necessary to debase and

revile their captives.” Smedley (1997) writes that slavery defenders “turned to the notion of the natural inferiority of Africans and thus their God-given suitability for slavery. Such arguments became more frequent and strident from the end of the eighteenth century on, and the characterizations of Africans became more negative.”

Another basis was scientific, through studies coming in the 1800s, claiming, among other things, that Blacks were a subspecies of humans or a different species, entirely. According to Curran (2020). “the Continent’s savants and natural philosophers no longer automatically looked to the Bible to explain the story of the human species. Intent on finding physical explanations for natural phenomena, naturalists employed more ‘empirical’ methods to solve one of the biggest ‘anthropological’ questions of the day: why did people from Africa, millions of whom were already toiling in European plantations, look different from white Europeans?” Before the 1750s, there already were more than a dozen scientific explanations of why Blacks looked different than Whites: “Some claimed that blackness came from vapors emanating from the skin; others claimed that black skin was passed on from generation to generation via the power of the maternal imagination or from darkened sperm; still others asserted that the heat or the air of the Torrid Zone darkened the humors and stained the skin” (Curran, 2020).

A dominant belief at the time, called degeneration, was that Blacks descended from Whites, and as they did, they became less intelligent, morally developed, physically different (e.g., smaller skulls and brains) and even physically damaged with “black brains, black bile, black sperm and even race-specific black lice” (Curran, 2020). Ultimately, physical differences, real and imagined, were linked to people’s economic and political statuses to create new identities organized around the concept of race, an idea that would persist long after even the end of slavery (Smedley, 1997, 1999, 2007). By the 1800s, “Physical differences were merged with status differences and coalesced to form a social hierarchy that placed ‘white’ at the top and ‘black’ at the bottom ... ‘white’ was an identity that designated a privileged, landholding (usually male) status.” And being White meant “having clear rights in the society while not being white signified your freedoms, rights, and property were unstable, if not, nonexistent” (Roediger, 2021). Thus, race is and always has been,

connected with economic factors such as social class. Smedley (1997) agrees, writing that race “was from its inception, and is today, about who should have access to privilege, power, status and wealth, and who should not.”

The “founding fathers,” men like Thomas Jefferson, saw Blacks as inferiors to Whites. In 1782, Jefferson wrote: that Blacks “are inferior to the whites in the endowment both of body and mind. ... Comparing them by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination ... in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior ... and ... in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous. ... never yet could I find that a black had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration; never see even an elementary trait, of painting or sculpture” (Magnis, 1999). Even the US Supreme Court, the highest court in the land, declared Blacks to be nothing but property, in the case of *Dred Scott v Sanford*, 60 U.S. (19 How.) 393 (1857). Chief Justice Roger Taney stated that, since negroes were property, they “were not intended by the framers of the Constitution to be accorded citizenship rights.”

Other historical tragedies and travesties became justified by race. Roediger (2021) claims, for example: “Over centuries, the false notion that ‘white’ people were inherently smarter, more capable, and more human than nonwhite people became accepted worldwide. This categorization of people became a justification for European colonization and subsequent enslavement of people from Africa” (as well as in Africa). Cruz (2017) even asserts that race “is almost entirely a product of the European imagination.” And she agrees that there was no concept of race until European colonization, which “needed ways of differentiating various rights, privileges, social, and legal standings between various laborers.” That is, race relates directly to, and stems directly from, economics. In this way, we can understand racism to be rooted in economic motives.

An early scholarly definition of racism was “the dogma that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to congenital inferiority and another group is destined to congenital superiority” (Benedict, 1945: 87). A similar but more developed definition is “any set of beliefs that organic, genetically transmitted differences (whether real or imagined) between human groups

are intrinsically associated with the presence or the absence of certain socially relevant abilities or characteristics, hence that such differences are a legitimate basis of invidious distinctions between groups socially defined as races” (van den Berghe, 1967: 11).

Bonilla-Silva (1997: 466) provides what he calls the idealist view of racism, one rooted in social psychology and focused on ideas or beliefs: “First, racism is defined as a set of ideas or beliefs. Second, those beliefs are regarded as having the potential to lead individuals to develop prejudices, defined as ‘negative attitudes towards an entire group of people’ (Schaefer, 1990: 53). Finally, these prejudicial attitudes may induce individuals to real actions or discrimination against racial minorities.” Discrimination, of course, refers to the actual acts committed against some groups by others based on prejudicial attitudes—acts that are considered unfair.

It should be noted that racism involves domination of at least one group by another group. As noted by Schaefer (1990: 16), racism is “a doctrine of racial supremacy, that one race is superior.” This suggests racism is ultimately about power, leading to relevant questions such as, who creates and benefits from certain power arrangements in society?

Racialized social systems are “societies in which economic, political, social, and ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors in ... categories of races. Races typically are identified by their phenotypes, but ... the selection of certain human traits to designate a racial group is always socially rather than biologically based” (Bonilla-Silva, 1997: 469). In these societies, racial categories are organized in a “hierarchy that produces definite social relations between the races. The race placed in the superior position tends to receive greater economic remuneration and access to better occupations and/or prospects in the labor market, occupies a primary position in the political system, is granted higher social estimation (e.g., is viewed as ‘smarter’ or ‘better looking’), often has the license to draw physical (segregation) as well as social (racial etiquette) boundaries between itself and other races ... The totality of these racialized social relations and practices constitutes the racial structure of a society” (Bonilla-Silva, 1997: 469-470). Once a society is racialized, “a set of social relations and practices based on racial distinctions develops at all societal levels ...

on the basis of this structure, there develops a racial ideology (what analysis have coded as racism)” (Bonilla-Silva, 1997: 474).

The major arguments of this approach are shown in Table 2.1. As you can see, this approach holds that racism is a normal and even functional part of society, used by those in power to hold on to their positions.

Table 2.1 Major Tenets of the Racialized Social Systems Approach

1. Race is part of the foundation and structure of society
 2. Racism is not just individual in nature
 3. Racism changes over time, meaning it is not static
 4. Racism is not irrational but instead rational and even functional
 5. Racism is often covert
 6. Racism is not just our legacy but in fact it persists (Bonilla-Silva, 1997).
-

Though race is invented, it has real-world impacts, as noted earlier. Consider, as one example, the impact of race on criminal justice. Stated simply, blacks are overrepresented among all criminal justice populations, meaning they make up more than their fair share of people on probation, people incarcerated, people on death row, and people on death row (Walker, Spohn, & DeLone, 2017).

Table 2.2 shows the impact of what we call race on different economic outcomes. As you can see, the unemployment rate and poverty rate is highest for Blacks, followed by Hispanics, and then Whites. Meanwhile, household income and wealth are highest for Whites, followed by Hispanics, and then Blacks. While the reasons for these differences in beyond the scope of this book, the point is that race continues to have real-world impacts on people, even though it is a human invention socially constructed by the powerful. That is the major lesson of this chapter.

Table 2.2 The Impact of “Race” on Economic Measures

	White	Black	Hispanic
Unemployment Rate (2017)	3.8%	7.5%	5.1%
Poverty Rate (2017)	8.7%	21.2%	18.3%
Median Household Income (2017)	\$68,145	\$40,258	\$50,486
Median Wealth (2016)	\$171,000	\$17,409	\$20,920

Sources:

https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2018/demo/p60-263.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwiCitGGsLfhAhXuYN8KHYGgBukQFjAAegQIBxAC&usg=AOvVaw2_ip0zZDO0skhUAoZRpEsV;

<http://apps.urban.org/features/wealth-inequality-charts/>;

<https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/race-and-ethnicity/2017/home.htm>

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CHAPTER 3

LESSON #3. MURDER IS VERY RARE RELATIVE TO THE SIZE OF THE POPULATION

Murder is the most serious crime in most societies and it is likely one of the most feared crimes by Americans. It is also one of the most covered stories in the news media. For example, one study showed that 26 percent of news stories were focused on murder, even though murder regularly accounts for only a tiny fraction of one percent of all crimes known to the police (Paulsen, 2000). Another study of crime reporting in one city over a one-year period found that a major, regional newspaper and a TV news station both disproportionately focused on violent crime, with homicide in particular. The study found that the newspaper covered on its front page about one major crime story every three days. Violent offenses made up 80% of the stories and 61% dealt with homicide (O'Hear, 2020)!

Stated simply, murder, in spite of how rare it is, sells. And so it is a common topic in both the news and entertainment media. For example, Robinson (2023) examined popular shows on television and found that many of them focus to a very large degree, on murder. They include, but are not limited to:

- A Crime to Remember
- American Crime
- American Monster
- Betrayed
- Bones
- Castle
- Crime Feed
- Crime Scene Investigation (CSI)
- Criminal Minds
- Deadly Demands

- Dead Silent
- Death by Gossip
- Dexter
- Do Not Disturb: Hotel Horrors
- Evil-in-Law
- Evil Lives Here
- Evil Stepmothers
- Forbidden: Dying for Love
- Forensic Files
- Hell House
- Homicide Hunter
- How to Get Away with Murder
- I am Homicide
- Ice Cold Killers
- I, Witness
- Killer Clergy
- Killer Confessions
- Killer Instinct
- Luther
- Making a Murderer
- Murder
- Murder Among Friends
- Murder Book
- Murder Calls
- Murder Chose Me
- Murder in the First
- Murder in the Hamptons
- MurderU
- Nightmare Next Door
- Obsession: Dark Desires
- Over My Dead Body
- Passport to Murder
- Real Detective
- See No Evil
- Shadow of Doubt
- Six Degrees of Murder