Minority-Group Criminality and Cultural Integration

Arthur Lewis Wood
MINORITY-GROUP CRIMINALITY AND CULTURAL INTEGRATION

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The author is Associate Professor of Sociology at Bucknell University. The material that is published here is taken from parts of his Doctor’s thesis that was prepared at the University of Wisconsin under the direction of Professor John Gillin. This article was read at the meetings of the Eastern Sociological Society in New York, May 4, 1946.—EDITOR.

The existence of many cultural groups in the United States offers American criminology excellent opportunity for a sociological analysis of crime causation. Since these different peoples often live under the same legal jurisdiction, their crime rates can be made comparable for study. Our task here is to survey the evidence for variability in minority-group crime rates and to test certain hypotheses concerning their explanation.

Criminality of Minority Populations

If social and cultural conditions are to be tested as explanations of variant criminality of social groups, comparability requires corrections for age and sex differences in population.

| TABLE I |
|---|---|
| CRIME RATES OF SELECTED GROUPS IN UNITED STATES |
| MAJORITY AND MINORITY GROUPS | CRIME RATES | MAJORITY AND MINORITY GROUPS | CRIME RATES |
| United States¹ | | | |
| Total | 144 | Seattle² | White | 11.1 |
| Total White | 117 | Japanese | 2.6 |
| Foreign-born | | Chinese | 9.6 |
| North and West Europe ("Old" immigration) | 42 | Filipino | 11.8 |
| Wales (lowest) | 17 | Seattle "Delinquency Area"³ | White | 27.7 |
| France (highest) | 63 | Japanese | 5.7 |
| South and East Europe ("New" immigration) | 78 | Total Population | 1.6 |
| Czechoslovakia (lowest) | 23 | Chinese | 1.0 |
| Austria (highest) | 125 | | |
| Native-White, Foreign or Mixed Parentage | | | |
| North and West Europe... | 59 | | |
| South and East Europe... | 128 | | |
| Negro | 447 | | |

bases, and certainty that whatever rate differences exist cannot be accounted for by discrepancies in the apprehension of offenders. The first of these difficulties may be remedied by statistical calculations, and the second can be estimated only on the basis of known conditions of law enforcement agencies.

The preceding table gives some selected minority-group crime rates and their respective majority-group comparisons. They are corrected rates so far as the available data allow. The high rate for Negroes is partially accounted for by discrimination against them in apprehension and prosecution. Nevertheless, evidence indicates that this tends to be counteracted by underprosecution of crimes against their own race and by a lower percentage of Negro convictions of those arrested than for the white race.¹

In the table, most differences between minority and majority groups, statistically speaking, are significantly different; hence, they require some explanation other than that of chance variation. Further statistical refinement would change some of the rates, but the general character of their variation may be taken as well-founded.²

The conclusion is that no single generalization can explain the criminality of minority groups, since their rates may vary from at least one-fourth to three times that of the majority-group.

Theories of Minority-Group Criminality

There are two broad theories concerning the criminality of minority groups. The first, supported by differential criminality between races, is the biological explanation. Three types of evidence refute such an analysis. First, crime is not biologically, but socially defined; hence it cannot have direct racial causation. Second, crime rates vary as much within racial groups as they do between such groups. This makes a social explanation at least as plausible as the racial hypothesis. Third, the fact that the crime rate of the same racial group changes during relatively short periods of time is inexplicable in terms of the racial hypothesis. We conclude that the variation in minority-group crime rates have, on the basis of the facts, a more plausible explanation.


² C. E. Van Vechten has further refined crime rates of foreign-born by types of offense and specific age groups, showing that the youthful foreign-born criminal commits relatively more crime than the native population. See “The Criminality of the Foreign Born,” Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology, Vol. 32, No. 2 (July-August, 1941), 139-147.
The sociological explanation is the other theory of minority-group crime. "Culture conflict" experienced by the minority-group is one such explanation. It was expressed well by Louis Wirth when he asked why a conflict between cultures was not significant, if mental conflicts are important in the etiology of criminal behavior.³

Eleanor Glueck discovered that the second generation had just as favorable social and economic conditions as their parents. Her conclusion was that if the second generation have a higher crime rate, it must be due to their greater culture conflict.⁴

Critics of the culture conflict theory suggest that it is inadequate to explain all the facts. In this connection E. H. Stofflet calls attention to the successive groups occupying the same slum area which have equally high crime rates irrespective of the differences between their cultures and that of the majority-group.⁵

Harold Ross claims that it is not the culture conflict but the socio-economic conditions of a group which explains its crime rate.⁶

He cites studies to show that urban peoples, especially slum-dwellers, have high crime rates irrespective of native backgrounds. The logic of the culture conflict idea would seem to be a valid and useful hypothesis, but it requires some modification.

The purpose here is to develop some more specific hypotheses in this sociological frame of reference to explain the variation in these rates. A few well-known facts must be considered. Culture conflict cannot entirely account for the phenomenon as all peoples in a position to experience "conflict" do not have high crime rates. Inferior economic conditions also are not the sole explanation as there are several examples of low rates where such conditions prevail, in spite of the many general findings to the contrary. Finally, many studies have pointed out that it is the strong social cohesion of the group which accounts for low rates.

³ "Culture Conflict and Misconduct," Social Forces, Vol. 9, No. 4 (June, 1931), 484-492.


Hypotheses of Minority-Group Criminality

The following concise statements are suggested explanations of minority-group criminality.

I Minority-group criminality is basically a function of the type of cultural and social integration of the group.

1. The maintenance of their native culture; the assimilation of the majority group culture; or the existence of anomie influence the degree of minority-group integration and, in turn, their relative crime rate.
   a. Inability to attain culturally defined ends; cultural values which excessively individualize behavior; lack of social participation; and (obviously) values and customs contrary to majority-group increase criminal behavior.
   b. Cultural values and social participation supporting strong family life and socially accepted group activities decrease criminal behavior.
   c. As assimilation becomes complete the minority-group crime rate approaches that of the majority-group.

II Inadequate economic conditions relative to the standards of the group influence the cultural and social integration of the population and, in turn, affect the crime rate.

1. The economic conditions and standards of the minority-group are in large part determined by the type of adjustment it makes to the majority culture.
   a. Without strong social integration, relative economic inadequacy further weakens the integration of the group and crime approaches a maximum.
   b. With strong social integration, relative economic inadequacy strengthens the integration of the group and crime approaches a minimum.

III Hostile treatment of minority groups influences their criminality.

1. Associated with anomie in the minority group, a high crime rate and crimes of violence are the results.
   a. Here anomie is principally a result of failure of the moral system to serve the purposes of the minority-group.
2. Associated with strong integration in the minority-group, a low crime rate results and the crimes committed may be peculiar to its socio-economic position.

Neither "culture conflict" nor inferior economic conditions, as such, is made the basis for understanding the crime rates. As the writer has stated elsewhere, he believes that the criminality of communities is best understood by their cultural and social integration.7

The thesis is equally well supported by an analysis of minority groups. However, both "culture conflict" and economic conditions are important factors. Various meanings of the concept of "culture conflict," such as the subjective response to relative poverty and hostility, and conflicting mores, are

brought out as special conditions under the above hypotheses. Although it is indicated in the hypotheses that adverse economic conditions may be associated with high crime rates, this holds only when social standards are high or integration is poor. "Cultural integration" is a subjective condition of loyalty to group standards, which is strengthened by "social integration" or social participation.

The Evidence from Former Studies

The evidence from previous studies is summarized here and is followed by the results of the author's study of three minority groups. Several American foreign-born populations tend to have relatively low crime rates. General observation would indicate that they possess strong family, group and religious loyalties. Although it has not been proved, most of them probably came to this country determined to work hard and become successful by American standards. Their loyalties and aims have been fortified and kept intact by their in-group participation. Where this latter condition has not prevailed there is evidence to indicate that their crime rate increases. Since the economic position of many of these groups is not comparable to that of the native-born, it would seem that these social conditions must be significant etiological factors.

Two field studies of European immigrant groups confirm the above suggestions. Studies of the Yugoslavians and Hungarians put a great deal of emphasis on the social control exercised by their many associations and family relationships. It is significant that their corrected crime rates according to Taft are less than the average for the South and East European countries, and less than half that of the native-white: Hungarians, 59; Yugoslavians, 54 (I, 1, b).

Furthermore, the juvenile delinquency rate is much higher for the Hungarians who have moved away from their integrated community (I, 1, c). Each of these groups gets into trouble in ways directly related to cultural patterns carried from Europe (violation of liquor laws and stealing coal), but in neither case is this sufficient to give them high crime rates.

On the other hand, the comparable Italian rate is 125. If our hypotheses are valid the suggestion is that their cultural and social integration was less able to withstand the impact of the economic deterioration they experienced in this country.

10 Figures in parentheses refer to above hypotheses.
A study by John Landesco strongly supports this contention (I, 1, a). The immigrants from North and West European countries have generally low rates. A possible explanation is that this "old" immigration became rural farmers. Here their economic standards were lower; the impact of the American culture in their relative isolation was less; and, therefore, they needed no greater social integration to produce a lower criminality (I, 1, b). The fact that one of the most urban groups of the "old" immigration, the French, have the highest rate (Taft's corrected rate, 63), lends more support to this contention.

The same sort of evidence explains the low crime rates for the Chinese and Japanese of this country. Studies previously cited by Hayner and Ronquillo as well as one by Andrew Lind indicate their strong family and group loyalties and their participation in mutual-aid associations (I, 1, b). Further evidence is provided by the following facts recorded in these studies. The American Chinese had higher rates before they came in numbers great enough to establish strong communities. The Japanese of Honolulu who had separated from their ethnic communities have high rates. In addition, the Filipinos of Seattle and the Hawaiians of Honolulu are similar racial groups, but they have relatively high crime rates. In both cases they have disorganized family life; they live in communities with other ethnic groups; and they lack strong mutual-aid and other indigenous associations. Although the high sex ratio could help account for the high Filipino crude rate, this is not the case with the Hawaiians. In addition to the rapid loss of their native culture and their insecure and inadequate economic conditions, the persecution and unequal treatment in social affairs explains the crime rates of the two latter groups (I, 1, a; II, 1, a; and III, 1).

The fact that the Jews are an ambitious, well educated people and at the same time denied many social opportunities would seem to have led many to crime as a means of adjustment. The contrary condition may be explained by some generally accepted statements. Their strong family and group loyalty is, without doubt, of some significance (I, 1, b). In addition, it should be observed that in spite of their persecution they have had a great deal of success in the economies of Western countries (II, 1, b). Since there seems to be little correlation between crime rates and education in Western countries,


the Jews' education probably is more directly related to their economic success than to their low crime rates. Perhaps it is their long continued persecution which has goaded them to prove their ability to act in socially acceptable ways.

The European statistics cited by Bonger show that the Jews tend to have relatively high rates for the crimes of fraud, forgery, embezzlement and similar crimes. This, of course, is accounted for by their occupational class, but also it shows their strong desire to succeed in their chosen occupational field—finance (III, 2). The Jews have exceedingly low crime rates for crimes of violence and sexual offenses. The fact that the Jews are becoming more assimilated in some countries is reflected in the most recent statistics for Netherlands where they actually have a slightly higher rate than the total population (I, 1, c).¹³

From the culture conflict type of analysis, one would expect a high rate for the second generation immigrant; however, Taft found the "corrected" rate for the descendants of the "old" immigration to be about half that of the native-born. This can be explained by their generally rural environment compared with the more predominant urban one for the South and East European second generation whose rate is higher. Both rates are definitely higher than those of their parent generations. Their crime rates have more nearly approached that of the general native-white — their criminality has become Americanized along with their general assimilation (I, 1, c). Also, their criminality has become Americanized by a change from a predominance of crimes of violence to predatory offenses,¹⁴ which gives credence to a sociological explanation. It is known that the group loyalties and foreign nationality associations of the second generation have largely disappeared; thus, their unfavorable urban economic position has not been ameliorated by strong social integration (I, 1, a and II, 1, a).

Is there a distinct Negro culture and rich social participation which refutes the general thesis presented here? In actual fact, the Negro has no strong ideologically distinct culture. What remains of an African or a plantation slave culture do not represent values of which the Negro is proud. To an overwhelming extent, the Negro, especially the Northern Negro, has thrown his lot in with the white man's social and economic system, and he has failed according to its standards. Whatever social integration the Negro has, it is insufficient to combat the impact of his low economic status (II, 1, a). His unequal

¹⁴ See Stofflet, op. cit.
treatment in all activities has been a felt persecution so de-
flating his ego that crime, particularly crime of violence, has
been a common form of adjustment (III, 1, a).

Hayner's comparative study of Indian criminality on differ-
ent reservations is further testimony.\textsuperscript{15} He found that those
tribes with low rates were the most isolated or employed, in-
dustrious peoples. High crime rates were associated with In-
dians in greater contact with white men; with poverty; or with
the tribes made very wealthy by the sale of their timber. Thus,
the isolated Indians were better able to maintain a distinct
cultural integration (I, 1, b). Not only the impoverished but
the extremely wealthy tribes had high rates, indicating that
economic conditions are of secondary importance to social in-
tegration in the analysis of crime causation (II, 1, a and I, 1, a
respectively).

\textit{Case Studies of Three Minority Groups}

We shall discuss here three minority groups in three small
Wisconsin communities which have been studied by the
author.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{I. A Culturally Disintegrated Group}

About a fifth of the population of Bayfield consists of Amer-
ican Indians, whose ancestors have been members of the com-
munity for almost a century. Their crime rate is 176 compared
with 27 for the majority population — a statistically significant
difference. They are religious people in church attendance,
with a participation rate of 88\% compared with 23\% for the
majority population. Other characteristics explain the Indian
crime rate. Their combined social participation rate is 21\%
compared with more than twice that for the white race (I, 1, a).
Indians are excluded from most of the adult associations ex-
ccept for one well educated Indian who is allowed membership
in the Commercial Club. Economically, they live in a caste-
like position. Their general relief rate is 358 and for WPA,
249; for the whites these are respectively, 99 and 40. Even
more indicative is the Indian rate for full-time regular employ-
ment of 16 compared with that of 161 (II, 1, a). This group
occupies no civil or political offices in the village. In short, the
white population of Bayfield despises the Indian and justifies
this attitude by what it calls his "nature."

The children of both races play together and belong to the

\textsuperscript{15} "Variability in the Criminal Behavior of American Indians,"\textit{ American Journal of Sociology, XLVII, No. 4} (Jan., 1942), 602-613. Rates varied from .3 to 13.1.

\textsuperscript{16} For details on the methods employed in computation of crime rates and social indices see article by author, \textit{op. cit.} and the appended table II at end of article.
same athletic teams, but no Indians belong to the scout troop and 4-H club. As children grow older the races cease to associate together. An outgrowth of the depression was a labor organization of the underemployed and WPA workers. Membership included both races and leadership was by the one well educated Indian. Although this offers no immediate hope for the Indian, it is indicative of his class position and it shows how completely the Indian has identified himself with the American social system.

The foregoing facts indicate how completely the Indian lacks social integration through community participation. In their culture they have completely lost the old patterns of behavior; they have accepted the American folkways. They worship Christ regularly in church; they work for wages or fish as the Norwegians of the community do; they buy food in stores and pay rent to landlords; they send their children to parochial grade school and to public high school; and they speak English. The Indians are superficially Americans, but ideologically demoralized. They have lost their old moral system and have acquired none of the inner values of the American culture which make it work. No matter how religious, how well educated, or how hard they work, the barriers to vertical social mobility are insurmountable; they remain casual laborers and socially ostracized. They have learned the folkways of getting along in everyday life, but the values concerning human life, private property, marriage, jury system, and secret ballot mean little to them because respect for these things serve them little purpose (I, 1, a).

On the other hand, they occupy the same position as the whites with respect to the system of criminal justice. They are apprehended, tried, and punished by the same agency; under the same rules of procedure; and with respect to the same criminal code. Anomie and the high crime rate are the result (III, 1, a). Furthermore, a third of the crimes committed by the Indians were crimes of violence. Six of the ten communities and minority groups studied had no such crimes and in none did the proportion approach that of the Indians. If the Indian had been able to maintain some essential features of his original culture and associational life of which he could be proud, the presumption is that his criminality would have been less. At least this is the picture which the following case study of a Bohemian group presents.

II. *A Culturally Integrated Group*

In the early part of this century first and second generation Bohemians began to move into Phillips from the surrounding
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rural areas. Including a few Slavs, who are not differentiated locally, they constitute about 23% of the population. They have a low crime rate of 10, compared with one three times as great for the remaining population.\(^{17}\) As a group, they had been hard working, thrifty farmers who had introduced several successful crops to the area. In the city they continued their energetic ways until now they are represented in most of the occupational roles, including that of the business man. They have not entered the professions, however, and they hold only one elective political position — that of deputy sheriff.

Partly due to the rivalry caused by their enterprising spirit and partly because of their in-group seclusiveness they were greatly disliked by the majority population. In the beginning they refused to participate politically and came to be dubbed "Bohunks." Both these conditions have been relaxed, none the less, they still occupy the role of stranger in the community of Phillips. Much the same situation occurred in church attendance. Nominally Catholic when the Bohemians came to this country, they were shunned by the German Catholics and since that time all but a few have refused to attend this church. So few attend the services of other churches that they are almost totally non-church goers. Six per cent of the adult males attend; 27% of the corresponding majority population do.

As for economic dependency, they hold an advantageous position, having general relief and WPA rates of 73 and 25 compared with the higher corresponding rates of 97 and 38 for the majority population. However, our survey of regular employment in business and professions indicates that their position is really undifferentiated from the majority peoples. Here the Bohemians have 170 per thousand of their numbers included, while the remainder have 178. Their rate for social participation of 91 is identical to that of the majority-group.

Our objective indices of Bohemian social and economic life do not give as ready an answer to their low crime rate as some qualitative considerations. As well as having strong family and group loyalties, their social solidarity is reinforced by their native recreational and gymnastic Sokol club and Bohemian fraternal organization which unite this ethnic population as one social group (I, 1, b). Quite likely their economic struggle for recognition and success has strengthened their integration on the basis of mutual-aid (II, 1, b). Finally, the mild hostility toward the Phillips' "Bohunk" has had the tendency to further their social solidarity (III, 2). In addition to their social integration their cultural integration has been assured.

\(^{17}\) This checks with Taft's extremely low rate for Czechoslovakian immigrants.
by their obvious successful use of American folkways to attain their socially acceptable life goals. It is quite evident that formal religious practices are unnecessary to preserve American social values as long as this group maintains its present integration. However, the younger generation of Bohemians are considered Americans — by occupation, in sports, through intermarriage, and even in attending Protestant Sunday schools. If their juvenile delinquency is an index, their crime rate will be Americanized also. The majority and minority juvenile delinquency rates are identical in Phillips (I, 1, c).

III. Undifferentiated Minority and Majority Groups

Our third minority-group consists of some Kentuckian immigrants and their descendants, constituting about 33% of the population of Crandon. Although their ancestors have lived in this country for some time, they were a more socially distinct group than most second generation peoples. The Kentuckians came to this area as woodsmen and farmers, and during the prohibition days they were known for their illegal production of liquor. They were differentiated from the northern population in their religious affiliations, their nonparticipation in social groups and politics, and in their lowly economic position. The “Kentucks,” as they are locally called, were a persecuted peoples.

Today, the Kentuckian crime rate for residents of Crandon is 43; for the northerners it is 53. These are undifferentiated rates; the difference can easily be accounted for by chance fluctuations. General relief and WPA rates are both lower for the Kentuckians (117 and 44; northerners, 156 and 58, respectively), but the figures measuring the degree of regular employment from the business survey place the Kentuckians in an unfavorable position (proportions are 27 to 163). This minority-group also ranks comparatively low in its degree of group participation and church attendance with rates of 22 and 13; the rates for northerners are 50 and 26 in like order.

Field observations better explain the similar crime rates. Several Kentuckians have become successful business men; one is a medical man accepted by northern patients. They now participate successfully in local politics — two on the city council and two on the school board; many of the younger generation have intermarried with the northerners; and every civic, recreational and mutual-aid group of the community has some Kentuckian members. Thus, in spite of the fact that members of this minority-group are over-represented among the casual and seasonal laborers as indicated by their low rate for regular employment, they have made strides toward equal acceptance
in all phases of social life. This evidence is supported by the
not uncommon opinion expressed by northerners that the Ken-
tuckians are now much better citizens. Early hostility, then,
has not resulted in complete anomie; nor has the integration
of the group been strong enough to perceptibly reduce the
crime rate (III). Also, the amount of informal in-group asso-
ciation by the Kentuckians and their emotional participation
in religious revivals reveals that our indices of formal social
and religious participation underestimate the gregariousness
of their social life. Hence, they are not lacking cultural and
social integration as compared with their majority-group.

For a proper perspective on the criminality of the two Cran-
don populations, it should be stated that they both have high
crime rates compared with those of twenty-three other small
communities of the author's original study. The Indian rate
is the only higher one. Findings from the former study showed
that the whole of the Crandon community is economically de-
pressed and in general falls comparatively low in social and
religious participation. The surprising thing here is that the
Kentuckians have not been more completely demoralized as a
persecuted minority-group. The explanation offered is that
their in-group associations and partial economic and social suc-
cess in the community accompanied by a low standard (not
level) of living has given them enough integration to have a
crime rate little different from the majority population.

Conclusions

The most obvious negative results are that minority groups
are too differentiated to make any general statement about
their criminality and that economic conditions and religious
participation, taken alone, cannot be considered direct causal
factors. Evidence available strongly suggests that cultural and
social integration, sometimes influenced by economic condi-
tions and persecution, are closely related to the magnitude of
crime rates. Cultural integration is indicated by the degree to
which the folkways of a group enable people to attain their
culturally defined ends. As frustration increases, demoraliza-
tion sets in and crime becomes one of the methods of adjust-
ment. Social integration, or the interaction and interstimula-
tion of individuals, tends to fortify the group's mores through
the threat of ostracism. When this is weakened, crime is also
more common. Thus, economically disadvantaged and perse-
cuted alien groups can maintain low crime rates when they are
socially and culturally integrated. As they migrate from
their minority-group communities or assimilate the democratic
ideology of the American culture such conditions tend to maxi-
mize these rates. Subjectively felt "culture conflict" is only significant after the minority-group has identified itself with the prevailing culture.

**TABLE II**
COMPARATIVE DATA FOR THREE MINORITY GROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUPS</th>
<th>EST. NO. MALES 15-44</th>
<th>NO. CRIMINALS²</th>
<th>CRIMINALS PER 1000</th>
<th>RELIEF CASES³</th>
<th>EMPLOYMENT INDEX⁴</th>
<th>SOCIAL PARTICIPATION⁵</th>
<th>RELIGIOUS ATTENDANCE⁷</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Bayfield</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Majority-group</td>
<td>220</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>46</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indians</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
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<td><strong>Crandon</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Majority-group</td>
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<td>156</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>163</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kentuckians</td>
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<td>91</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Based on average of 1930 and 1940 population; proportion of males 15-44, 1940; and proportion in minority-groups from 1940 census for Indians; from school census, registered voters and business survey for other two.
2. Adult male felons two or more years resident, convicted between July 1, 1931 and June 30, 1939.
3. All types of relief, average case load for Feb. and June, 1939 per 1000 population, 1940.
4. Average case load for Feb. and June, 1939 per 1000 population, 1940.
5. From field survey of all businesses, July, 1939; employers and regular employees per 1000 population, 1940.
6. Percentage of males, members of civic, recreational and mutual-aid groups.
7. Percentage of males 15 and over attending church at least once a month.