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CRIME AND THE NATIVE BORN SONS OF EUROPEAN IMMIGRANTS

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Concerning the number of causes of crime of native born individuals of foreign stock it is generally held that:

1. This group has a higher crime rate than the other white nativity groups, i. e., the native born of native stock and the foreign born. Further, statistics have been presented to substantiate this view.

2. This higher crime rate of the native born of foreign stock has been generally attributed to the fact that the cultural guides of their parents' social heritage have been swept from them in their strange new turbulent environment and those of the new cultural milieu have not yet been instilled in them. They have been pictured as living apart from both the cultural worlds of their parents and of America. Disoriented by language differences, institutional disparities, and other fundamental cultural contradictions, the native born of foreign parentage, it is claimed, have drifted into anti-social conduct, into delinquency and eventually crime.¹

The purpose of this paper is to analyze somewhat critically this general thesis. To do so, certain widely accepted remarks concerning urban and rural crime rates are presented as a basis for discussion.

Many criminologists have observed the marked disparity in crime rates between urban and rural districts. Concomitant with urban life are increased complexities; hence an increase in the number of forbidden acts and consequently of crime.² On the other hand rural areas, regardless of the nativity of its inhabitants, whether native Americans or German, Swedish, or other foreign born groups, or the children of these immigrants, have, as a general rule, a lower crime rate than urban dwellers.

This same phenomena that city dwellers have a higher crime

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¹ Parmelee, Maurice, "Criminology," Macmillan Co., New York, 1918, pp. 227-9.

² Reports of the U. S. Immigration Commission, Vol. 36, "Immigration and Crime," 1911, p. 2.

Shaw, Clifford R., "The Natural History of a Delinquent Career," University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1931, pp. 97-98.

rate regardless of nativity is noted by European criminologists. The German Gustav Aschaffenburg remarks that in Italy the urban rural population ratio was 32:68, but the urban rural crime ratio was 43:57. For France he contends that although city dwellers constituted but 30% of the population, they contributed approximately 50% of the crime. In Germany, cities and districts with more than 20,000 inhabitants had 134.2 delinquents per 100,000 adults, whereas rural districts had but 96.6 delinquents per 100,000 adults.³

These crude statistics verify the observations of many students in the field that the rural manner of life does not produce as many crimes as does the urban mode of life. Regardless of the facts of a rural dwellers nativity, racial characteristics, language, and customs, be they American, German, French, or Italian, the country inhabitant tends to react the same way as regards crime in the rural economy. For our analysis the conclusion is pertinent that despite cultural differences rural life produces in all countries a lower crime rate than urban living. From this it logically follows that cultural differences are not causative of crime but the broad socio-economic environment of a way of life. Not whether an individual is a German or an Italian or a Swedish immigrant on the American plains, or a son of that Swedish immigrant, but the fact that he is a farmer living the rural life is causative of crime.

The differences between urban and rural economies are distinct and easily recognizable. Within an urban economy conditions are not uniform for all dwellers therein. There are the extremes of the poverty stricken inhabitants crowded in the deteriorated slum areas on the one hand and on the other the well-to-do dwelling in the comfortable homes of the outlying districts. In these two groups the family life, educational opportunities, religious training, financial income, and general cultural tradition are as markedly dissimilar as the differences between urban and rural dwellers. It has been noted that differing urban and rural socio-economic conditions have produced differing crime rates whatever may be the nativity of those urban and rural dwellers. Is it not logical to expect that the differing socio-economic conditions of the slum and the prosperous areas of a city likewise produce varying crime rates whatever may be the nativity of those urban dwellers?

In the United States it has been difficult to study this general

³ Aschaffenburg, Gustav, "Crime and Its Repression," Translated by Adalbert Albrecht, Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1913, pp. 61-2.

contention because, due to immigration, differing racial, nativity, or cultural groups usually occupied the poverty stricken and prosperous areas. Thus it could not be ascertained whether divergent crime rates were due to disparate socio-economic conditions or to cultural divergencies. However European countries with their cultural and racial homogeneity, present an opportunity to test this thesis. By and large in France, Italy, and Germany urban dwellers would enjoy the same general cultural heritage and yet suffer differing socio-economic conditions on the varying economic levels. Thus as nativity, racial, and cultural elements are constant or rather uniform for both the prosperous and poverty stricken city dwellers, any difference in crime rates must be attributed to the only varying factor, the economic one.

Bonger in his volume "Criminality and Economic Conditions" has presented a mass of statistical evidence on this point. It is drawn from such European countries as Italy, France, Austria, Prussia, and England. Such indices as the amount of property a criminal has, whether he has a bank account, what his occupation is, and other such items are used to ascertain his economic position. Then the number of criminals in each economic group is divided by the number of that group in the total population in order to get crime ratios for the purpose of comparison.

A typical study is that for Italy using "Statistics of persons sentenced by the assizes, the correctional tribunals, and the justices of the peace."

<i>Convicts</i>	{	<i>Non-Criminal Population</i>	}
87%	{	56% Indigent	}
	{	31% Strict necessities of life	}
12%	{	10% Moderate well off	}
	{	2% Rich	}
		60%	
		40%	

This writer realizes fully that these statistics have imperfections. Bonger concludes, "all statistics cited show then that the poor supply a very great proportion of the convicts, in every case a greater proportion than they bear to the population in general."⁴ The important considerations of these European investigations for our original purpose is that they indicate a marked difference in crime rates between roughly the slum dwellers and the more well-to-do when both are of the same institutional and cultural heritage.

⁴ Bonger, William Adrian, "Criminality and Economic Conditions," Translated by Henry P. Horton, Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1916, pp. 436-462.

The European immigrant, landing on American shores, was forced to find cheap lodgings as he was usually penniless. These cheap lodgings he found in the disorganized slum areas of the industrialized American cities.⁵ The behavior of the new-comer himself was determined by behavior patterns organized in the culturally more stable European environment but his native born children suffered the stresses and strains of the new individualistic environment.

These children, the native born offspring of foreign parentage, were reared under those barren, poverty stricken socio-economic conditions that produced a higher crime rate than a more sheltered and prosperous environment. The environment of the slum dwellers meant for all the inhabitants there, be they of native or foreign parentage, a life conditioned by irregular, poorly paid employment, by a family disorganized by the necessity of the mother to leave the task of home-making in search of work to supplement the chief wage-earner's meager income, by the general institutional disorganization, by inadequate educational opportunities and a sordid, barren milieu for the children. These vital forces were far more powerful than the fact that one slum-reared child's parents spoke Italian and another's parents spoke native American slang, that the one ate spaghetti, and other beef stew.

If the crimes of the native born of native stock and those of the native born of foreign stock were stimulated by different causes, the cause in the latter case being a cultural clash between American and European customs which is non-existent in the former case, then there should be little similarity in the growth from childhood to careers of crime between both groups. If, on the other hand, crimes in both cases were stimulated by the same cause, namely dwelling on the same socio-economic level, then there should be definite similarity in the maturation from childhood to crime.

Anti-social behavior first becomes evident in the delinquencies of predatory boy gangs. Boys naturally tend to play with other boys. The environment determines whether this spontaneous grouping is social or anti-social, whether it is a respectable Boy Scout Troop or a predatory gang.⁶ The typical city "kids" gang consisted mainly of the native born offspring of foreign born parents, but

⁵ Zorbaugh, Harvey Warren, "Gold Coast and Slum," University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1929, pp. 10-11.

⁶ Thrasher, Frederick M., "The Gang," University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1929, pp. 10-11.

nativity per se was not responsible for the gang problem.⁷ All boys of the same socio-economic class, whether of foreign, negro, or native white parentage, enter into gangs with equal facility.⁸ Boys of the more prosperous classes do not form anti-social gangs, not because they are of native white stock, but because of their prosperous environment.⁹ It is needless for them to rebel against the mores and law, for life has been comfortable to them. Others, regardless of parental nativity and because of their lower socio-economic position, did not willingly accept the mores and law that doomed them to a barren life, so naturally violated them.

This disregard by delinquency of nativity is illustrated by Chicago districts near the Loop, the stock yards, and the south Chicago steel mills which have had high delinquency rates as far back as the records go, and yet whose population composition has been constantly changing.¹⁰ In many cities it has been noted that the incidence in delinquency varied more accurately with community background than with nationality. High rates coincided with the areas of physical deterioration.¹¹

There has been no fixed boundary between the boy's predatory gang and the adult's criminal group.¹² Behavior patterns organized in the former were carried over into and accentuated by the latter. Sons, both of native and foreign born stocks, made this promotion from juvenile delinquent to adult offender with equal facility. A follow up of 420 Chicago cases found a negligible difference.¹³ Continuance of anti-social conduct was dependent upon other conditions than nationality.¹⁴

Further, evidence that the crimes of native born white of both European and American parentage were the resultant not of conditions peculiar to either group but of the same general socio-eco-

⁷ Thrasher, Frederick M., "The Gang," University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1929, pp. 191-2.

⁸ Thrasher, Frederick M., "The Gang," University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1929, p. 217.

⁹ Thrasher, Frederick M., "The Gang," University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1929, p. 217.

¹⁰ Shaw, Clifford R., "Delinquency Areas," University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1929, p. 203.

¹¹ Shaw, Clifford R., "Delinquency Areas," University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1929, p. 203.

¹² Shaw, Clifford R., "The Natural History of a Delinquent Career," University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1931, p. 18.

¹³ Healy, William and Bronner, Augusta F., "Delinquents and Criminals," Macmillan Co., New York, 1926, pp. 109-111.

¹⁴ Healy, William and Bronner, Augusta F., "Delinquents and Criminals," Macmillan Co., New York, 1926, p. 113.

conomic pressures affecting both is shown by the fact that the types of crimes the immigrant's sons were guilty of were similar not to the offenses of their parents, but to the offenses committed by native Americans. This tendency of the second generation to shift away from crimes peculiar to immigrants and towards native crimes is substantiated by records of all commitments to Massachusetts's penal institutions during the year ending September 30, 1909, and by the records of convictions in the New York Court of General Sessions from October 1, 1908 to June 30, 1909.¹⁵

In summary, then, it was noted by an examination of both American and European reports that the differences in socio-economic conditions between urban and rural life resulted in differences in crime rate whatever may be the nativity or cultural heritage of the individuals. Further it is contended that there are just as marked differences between the environment of prosperous and poverty stricken districts within the urban areas which also result in differing crime rates. Thus the crime of the native born sons of foreign born parentage may be a result not of cultural maladjustment as is usually held, but of their position in a poverty class, a class which breeds criminals with equal facility from all its constituents be they of native or foreign parentage. This view is substantiated by evidence that indicates that native born whites of both American and European parents, if on the same socio-economic level, formed predatory groups, that both grew up into careers of crime with equal facility, and that both were guilty of the same types of crime. This coincidence of factors indicates that the criminality of both was not due to conditions peculiar to each group individually, but to general conditions affecting both equally, namely, their residence in a poverty stricken socio-economic class.

This explanation, if accepted, harmonizes the apparent contradiction between statistical studies, on the one hand, which demonstrate a higher crime rate for the native born of European parentage than for the native born of American parentage, and the personal experiences of countless officials and investigators, on the other hand, who claim, after handling hundreds of second generation offenders, that the foreign stock from which the offenders sprang was in no way responsible for the criminality.¹⁶ As the

¹⁵ Reports of the U. S. Immigration Commission, Vol. 36, "Immigration and Crime," 1911, p. 14.

¹⁶ "National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, Crime and the Foreign Born," p. 163.

native born sons of foreign parentage tend to be segregated on that income level which has a high crime rate and the native stock tends to be dispersed through all income levels, then obviously statistical studies would endow the former with a higher crime ratio. To illustrate this, an example may help.

	A	B
	700	300
\$2,000	300	700

Let us assume that the \$2,000 annual income line divides the high and low crime rate groups. Of course there would be a slow gradation from the high to the low, but this simple example will do. Let us further assume that the crime rate beneath the \$2,000 income line is 100 per 1,000 and above the line 50 per 1,000. With this distribution, nativity group A would have a crude crime rate of 65 per 1,000 whereas nativity group B would have a rate of 85 per 1,000. This flattering crime rate of group A is obviously due to a favorable population distribution. And this favorable distribution holds true for the native born of native stock.

In conclusion concerning the number and causes of crime of native born individuals of foreign stock, in contradiction to accepted opinion, these views are tentatively presented.

1. Statistics seem to indicate a higher crime rate for the native born of European stock only because they disregard the various income levels. What their actual crime rate is is still a matter of opinion and it is this writer's hypothesis that all peoples on the same socio-economic level have approximately the same crime rate.

2. The second generation is not a group culturally adrift with neither the culture of their parents nor of their new environment to guide them, but is a group with a very definite culture, a culture of a socio-economic level that is determined by irregular, poorly paid employment and results in broken homes, inadequate educational and recreational opportunity, and a general stunted environment. And this culture determines for its inhabitants, whatever their nativity, a high crime rate.

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