

1943

## Various Factors in a Penal Population

Bernard Locke

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc>

 Part of the [Criminal Law Commons](#), [Criminology Commons](#), and the [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Bernard Locke, Various Factors in a Penal Population, 33 J. Crim. L. & Criminology 316 (1942-1943)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology by an authorized editor of Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

# VARIOUS FACTORS IN A PENAL POPULATION

Bernard Locke<sup>1</sup>

## *The Problem and Its Importance*

Research into the intellectual, educational, occupational and personality status of penal groups has been noted for its highly contradictory results. There are several reasons for the confusion which has arisen and these will be noted below. Since crime stands as one of the major costs of modern living it is important to determine the role played by each of these factors in a prison population in order to help determine whether they are primary causes in the production of criminal behavior.

Factors which have made for contradictory results are:

A. *The research tools used in many of the studies were invalid and unreliable.*

1. The *opinions* of those "well acquainted" with criminals were frequently employed instead of objective measures of the trait under consideration.

2. The tests used in many studies were intended for children and were not standardized for adults.

3. There was a frequent disregard of language and other handicaps in reporting test data.

B. *The assumptions made in many studies were not logically sound.*

1. There was a marked confusion between concomitance and causation. The error was often made of assuming that one condition was the cause of another merely because they appeared together frequently, even though there was no logical basis for making such an assumption.

2. There was a frequent failure to recognize crime as essentially a local problem; dependent upon elements such as local laws, comparative homogeneity of racial stock, and court attitudes.

3. Many investigators disregarded the fact that crime is not a static thing and that it is an ever-changing phenomenon.

C. *There has been an overemphasis on the role of certain factors to the exclusion of others.*

Much of the research in the field of criminology has been devoted to the demonstration of the extent of low-grade mentality in the

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Locke is Psychologist in the State Prison at Dannemora, New York. This article is an abstract of his dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Education in New York University.

penal group, neglecting factors such as vocational adjustment, personality, academic adjustment, and even superior intelligence.

It has been the purpose of this investigation to examine intelligence, education, vocational status, and personality as they appear in a penal population by means of accepted objective measures.

### *Historical Background*

Studies in this field of research are so numerous as to fill some 633 pages of bibliography for the period preceding 1927 and 413 pages for the interval from 1927 to 1931, more than 30,000 references in all.

Since a comprehensive historical survey of the problem was relatively impossible the investigator limited himself to presenting chronological samplings of the literature for each of the subjects under consideration. Special emphasis was given to investigations of inmates in New York State Penal Institutions since the present experimental group came from a New York prison.

### *The Tests and the Samplings*

*Intelligence*—The data on intelligence result from the examination of 1,345 consecutive admissions to Clinton Prison in approximately a two-year period ending June, 1939. The group consisted of 1,218 white individuals and 127 Negroes. The sample was an unselected one in that all the individuals entering the institution, during this period, were examined. All of the men were felons, having committed a major offense in the State of New York. No division as to type of crime or number of previous sentences served was made. A battery of clinically acceptable group tests was used in the examination of each man. Provision was made for the individual examination of all men falling below the twelfth year level, who suffered from a language handicap, or who were illiterate.

Similar data, for comparative purposes, were presented for the 14,924 individuals who populated the thirteen institutions under the jurisdiction of the New York State Department of Correction in December, 1938. This included 9,941 penitentiary inmates, 2,310 reformatory cases and the balance came from the institutions for defective delinquents. The data for these institutions included 11,634 white men and 3,290 Negroes.

*Academic Achievement*—1,320 consecutive admissions to Clinton Prison during the same period were examined with the New Stanford Achievement Test in order to determine their academic achievement levels. This test is recognized as one of the most valid and reliable measures of academic achievement.

This group included 1,194 white inmates and 126 Negroes. Similar data were presented for the 14,924 inmates in the thirteen institutions of the New York State Department of Correction. The data for these institutions were broken down to their white and

Negro components as well as for the different types of institutions.

*Academic Grade Claimed*—The replies of 1,311 consecutive admissions to Clinton Prison to the question: "What is the last grade that you completed in school?" are presented.

This group included 1,186 whites and 125 Negroes. Similar data were presented for 14,812 individuals of the total state prison population.

*Academic Achievement Quotients*—Academic achievement quotients were computed for 1,261 unselected Clinton Prison inmates. This number included 1,140 white inmates and 121 Negroes.

*Personality*—The last 262 literate, white inmates, admitted to Clinton Prison, in the period noted above, were given the Bernreuter Personality Inventory. This scale measures the following aspects of personality:

1. Neurotic Tendency; 2. Self-sufficiency; 3. Introversion-Extroversion; 4. Dominance-Submission; 5. Self-confidence; 6. Sociability.

An item analysis of the 125 questions making up the scale was done for these 262 cases.

*Occupational Status*—The occupational status of the last 179 white admissions to Clinton Prison was determined in accordance with Fryer's occupational-intelligence standards.

The occupational interests of this group were classified in a similar manner for comparative purposes.

Fryer's standards are the result of his elaboration and further standardization of the groupings established during the last World War and based on the examinations of the draftees for the army.

### Results

*Intelligence*—The mean mental age for the 1,345 Clinton Prison inmates was found to be 13.9 years. The mean for the white portion of the group was 14.0 years. The 127 Negroes earned a mean mental age of 12.8 years. The difference between the whites and Negroes was a statistically significant one, the critical ratio being 7.1.

*Academic Achievement*—The 1,320 Clinton Prison inmates earned a mean of 7.3 grades on the Stanford Achievement Test. The white inmates earned a mean of 7.4 grades and the Negroes 6.4 grades. The medians were 7.4 for the total population, 7.5 for the white portion, and 6.1 for the Negroes. The difference between the whites and Negroes was statistically significant.

Academic achievement was found to correlate closely with mental age, the coefficient of correlation being .73.

*Academic Grade Claimed*—The 1,311 Clinton Prison inmates claimed a mean of 6.9 school grades completed. The white portion of the group averaged 7.0 grades and the Negroes 5.8 grades. The medians for the three groups were: 7.2, 7.3, and 5.8 respectively.

The coefficient of correlation between Stanford Achievement scores and academic grades claimed was .64.

*Academic Achievement Quotients*—The mean achievement quotient for the 1,261 Clinton Prison inmates was found to be 97.9. The white inmates earned a mean of 97.9 and the Negroes 98.1. The medians for the three groups were: 97.4 for the total group, 97.3 for the whites, and 97.4 for the Negroes. The difference between the whites and Negroes was not statistically significant. The critical ratio was 0.21.

*Personality*—The distribution of scores on the Bernreuter Inventory resulted in the following description:

The members of this group avoid the extremes of neuroticism and stability, fewer of them are outstandingly neurotic or well balanced emotionally than would be expected from the norms for adults. This sampling tends to be self-sufficient but the distribution of scores rather closely parallels the adult norms. These Clinton Prison inmates are extroverted in their make-up to a marked degree. They are submissive, tending to be dominated rather than dominating others in face-to-face situations. In agreement with this last point, they lack self-confidence, feeling inferior in respect to their abilities. In keeping with its extroverted make-up and in spite of its submissiveness and feelings of inferiority it is a gregarious group, seeking out company in preference to solitude.

*Occupation*—Twenty-eight individuals (15.7% of the group) were employed in occupations which fall into classifications higher than the intellectual ability which they possessed. Fifty-nine (33.1%) were employed in occupations of a lower intellectual range than their mean intellectual level.

When the occupational interests were tabulated twenty-one members of the group (11.7%) expressed an interest in an occupation at a higher level than that in which they had been working. However, most of these were previously working at vocational levels below their capacity. Six of the individuals (3.4%) expressed an interest in vocations that would be classed as lower than those they could be expected to work at successfully on the basis of intellectual capacity.

Twenty-eight individuals (15.6%) expressed an interest in an occupation other than the one that they had been engaged in, but on the same occupational level.

Six individuals (3.4%) were undecided as to what type of work they would like to do.

Twenty-one of those who expressed an interest in changing occupations chose fields in which they had had no experience. The remaining thirty-four indicated occupations in which they had once worked.

*Conclusions*

On the basis of comparisons with data for the other New York State Penal Institutions, norms for the general population, the population of New York State, and other research projects, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. The 1,345 prison inmates examined, as representatives of the penal population of New York State, are not inferior in their intellectual endowment to the non-penal society from which they come.

2. There are not a disproportionate number of mental defectives among men committed to prison in New York State.

3. In considering intelligence as a factor in crime one must consider the individual of superior intelligence as well as the feebleminded.

4. Clinton Prison inmates as a whole are not the product of an inadequate amount of formal education.

5. This prison group does not contain an excessive number of illiterates.

6. The group of prison inmates studied does not demonstrate excessive numbers of outstanding personality defects.

7. The 179 inmates studied do not show a preponderance of the occupationally unskilled or industrial misfits.

*Suggestions for Further Investigation*

One item for further investigation is urgently suggested by the fact that a new body of information is being collected for the general population through the examination of the new army "trainees." This would present an ideal opportunity to bring the comparative standards up to date, particularly, in the matter of the intelligence of the Negro population.

Another interesting item for research is to study whether personality changes occur in individuals incarcerated for an extended period of time. This would serve as an index to the extent to which the personality picture of an individual is affected by prison environment.