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POVERTY, RACE AND CRIME

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Criminologists have generally concluded that poverty and slum conditions are positively associated with criminality, that the foreign born and their children are less involved in criminality than the children of native born, and that Negroes are more involved than whites.¹ These conclusions, however, relate to the crimes of the proletariat, such as, rape, murder, robbery, assault, burglary, and larceny, rather than to the "white collar" crimes.

The conclusions of criminologists, like those of other social scientists, are highly tentative in character. It is desirable to test them in various ways from time to time to see how well they are holding up. The correlations presented in this paper are intended as such a test.

In this study American cities showing populations greater than 100,000 in 1940 have been divided into two groups:

Group A: Fifty-five cities with populations
100,000 to 250,000

Group B: Thirty-six cities with populations
over 250,000.²

Among the cities in each of these groups the 1939 rates for murder, robbery, assault, burglary, and larceny have been correlated respectively with fifteen 1939-1940 indices of socio-economic conditions.³ The batteries containing the highest coefficients are presented here. A few correlations between 1930 crime rates and 1930 socio-economic indices are also presented.

In Table I the five 1939 crime rates are correlated respectively with three indices of community economic prosperity. All but one of the resulting coefficients are negative, and that one

¹ Edwin H. Sutherland, *Principles of Criminology*, 3rd ed., N. Y.; J. B. Lippincott Co., 1939, pp. 120, 124-126, 176, 178-179. Donald E. Taft, *Criminology*, N. Y.; Macmillan Co., 1942, pp. 91, 105-106, 114, 133, 228-229. See other criminology texts also.

² Jersey City, N. J., is not included in this study because its 1939 crime data is incomplete.

³ The crime rates have been derived from the F.B.I. *Uniform Crime Reports*. One socio-economic index on property valuations and another on cost of city governments were derived from figures in the 1940 *World Almanac*. The remaining thirteen socio-economic indices have been taken from the 1940 *Census*.

is not of statistical significance. Though it may also be said that several of the negative coefficients are likewise not of statistical significance, the preponderance of negative signs in this battery does lend confirmation to the conclusion that an inverse relationship exists between prosperity and crime and, hence, that a direct relationship exists between poverty and crime.

In Table II the same five crime rates are correlated with two indices of inadequate housing conditions. All but two of the resulting coefficients are positive. Since the two negative coefficients lack statistical significance this battery appears to support the conclusion that a direct relationship exists between inadequate housing and crime.

In Table III the 1939 and 1930 crime rates are correlated respectively with 1940 and 1930 nativity percentages. All resulting coefficients are negative. The conclusion of low criminality among the foreign born and their children is thereby supported.

In Table IV the 1939 and 1930 crime rates are correlated respectively with 1940 and 1930 percentages for Negro populations. All the resulting coefficients are positive. The conclusion that disproportionate criminality exists among Negroes is given some support, therefore, as far as these five types of crimes are concerned.

The correlations presented in this study have, on the whole, conformed to expectations.

This study has been patterned after one by Ogburn, which dealt with the 1929-1930 relationships between crime rates and socio-economic conditions throughout American cities.⁴ Ogburn's coefficients for rent and nativity are similar to those of this study. In contrast to the findings of this study, however, he found a low positive relationship between 1929 wage levels and 1930 crime rates. Ogburn was, nevertheless, reluctant to make claims for this latter finding. In the present study the expected negative relationship between income levels and crime rates does appear.

Ogburn's study and this one serve to test on a broader basis the relationships which students of crime and the business cycle and students of the life histories of criminals have set forth. It is striking that the findings of these broader studies have supported the conclusions of the narrower ones in so many respects.

⁴ William F. Ogburn, "Factors in the Variation of Crime Among Cities," *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 30, March 1935, pp. 12-34.

The formulas used in this study are⁵:

$$r = \frac{\frac{\sum (XY)}{N} - \left(\frac{\sum(X)}{N}\right)\left(\frac{\sum(Y)}{N}\right)}{\sqrt{\frac{\sum(X^2)}{N} - \left(\frac{\sum X}{N}\right)^2} \cdot \sqrt{\frac{\sum(Y^2)}{N} - \left(\frac{\sum Y}{N}\right)^2}}$$

$$\sigma_r = \frac{1 - r^2}{\sqrt{N}}$$

TABLE I.

THREE INDICES OF COMMUNITY ECONOMIC PROSPEROUSNESS CORRELATED WITH THE RATES OF FIVE MAJOR CRIMES.

Rates of Five Major Crimes 1939	Perc. of Members of the Experienced Labor Force 1940 Reporting Incomes of \$1,000 or More for the Year 1939	Average Monthly Rent 1940	Per Capita Assessed Valuation of Real Property 1939
Murder and Non-Negligent Homicide	-.464 ± .106*	-.379 ± .115	-.270 ± .125
Robbery	-.661 ± .094	-.536 ± .119	-.355 ± .146
Aggravated Assault	.038 ± .135	-.206 ± .129	-.327 ± .120
Burglary	-.054 ± .166	-.119 ± .164	-.315 ± .150
Breaking and Entering	-.234 ± .127	-.156 ± .132	-.137 ± .132
Larceny Includes Both Over and Under \$50	-.527 ± .120	-.307 ± .151	-.112 ± .165
Over and Under \$50	-.008 ± .135	-.160 ± .131	-.266 ± .125
Under \$50	-.049 ± .166	-.228 ± .158	-.416 ± .138

* Upper figures—Coefficients of Correlation for Group A: Cities 100,000 to 250,000, 1940.

Lower figures—Coefficients of Correlation for Group B: Cities over 250,000, 1940.

TABLE II.

TWO INDICES OF HOUSING CONDITIONS CORRELATED WITH THE RATES OF FIVE MAJOR CRIMES.

Rates of Five Major Crimes 1939	Perc. of Dwellings Needing Major Repairs 1940	Perc. of Dwellings Reporting Occupancy of 1.51 or more Persons per Room 1940
Murder and Non-Negligent Homicide	.529 ± .097*	.807 ± .047
Robbery	.591 ± .108	.797 ± .061
Aggravated Assault	.226 ± .128	.488 ± .103
Burglary	.190 ± .161	.267 ± .155
Breaking and Entering	.398 ± .113	.682 ± .072
Larceny Includes Both Over and Under \$50	.380 ± .143	.609 ± .105
Over and Under \$50	-.100 ± .133	.353 ± .118
Under \$50	.345 ± .147	.266 ± .155
Over and Under \$50	-.067 ± .134	.288 ± .124
Under \$50	.209 ± .159	.253 ± .156

* Upper figures—Coefficients of Correlation for Group A: Cities 100,000 to 250,000, 1940.

Lower figures—Coefficients of Correlation for Group B: Cities over 250,000, 1940.

⁵ See Herbert Arkin and Raymond R. Colton, *An Outline of Statistical Methods*, 4th ed., N. Y.: Barnes and Noble Inc., 1939, pp. 80-82, 119.

TABLE III.

INDICES OF IMMIGRANT POPULATIONS 1940 AND 1930 CORRELATED WITH THE RATES OF FIVE MAJOR CRIMES 1939 AND 1930, RESPECTIVELY.

Rates of Five Major Crimes 1939	Perc. Foreign Born White 1940	Perc. Native White of Foreign Parentage 1940	Perc. Native White of Mixed Parentage 1940
Murder and Non-Negligent Homicide	— .591 ± .088*	— .635 ± .080	— .756 ± .058
	— .651 ± .096	— .696 ± .086	— .794 ± .062
Robbery	— .537 ± .096	— .588 ± .088	— .511 ± .160
	— .329 ± .149	— .395 ± .141	— .377 ± .143
Aggravated Assault	— .496 ± .102	— .559 ± .093	— .692 ± .070
	— .358 ± .145	— .396 ± .140	— .480 ± .128
Burglary— Breaking and Entering	— .392 ± .114	— .453 ± .107	— .403 ± .113
	— .503 ± .124	— .597 ± .107	— .431 ± .136
Larceny Includes Both Over and Under \$50	— .523 ± .098	— .564 ± .092	— .384 ± .115
	— .461 ± .131	— .554 ± .115	— .366 ± .144
Rates of Five Major Crimes 1930	Perc. Foreign Born White 1930	Perc. Native White of Foreign Parentage 1930	Perc. Native White of Mixed Parentage 1930
Murder and Non-Negligent Homicide	— .547 ± .106	— .598 ± .097	— .738 ± .069
	— .646 ± .114	— .672 ± .107	— .769 ± .080
Robbery	— .378 ± .129	— .424 ± .124	— .338 ± .134
	— .476 ± .152	— .549 ± .137	— .414 ± .163
Aggravated Assault	— .253 ± .141	— .345 ± .133	— .525 ± .109
	— .390 ± .166	— .378 ± .168	— .372 ± .169
Burglary— Breaking and Entering	— .176 ± .146	— .252 ± .141	— .039 ± .151
	— .393 ± .166	— .535 ± .140	— .370 ± .169
Larceny Includes Both Over and Under \$50	— .404 ± .126	— .454 ± .120	— .230 ± .143
	— .117 ± .193	— .265 ± .182	— .210 ± .187

*Upper figures—Coefficients of Correlation for Group A: Cities 100,000 to 250,000, 1940.

Lower figures—Coefficients of Correlation for Group B: Cities over 250,000, 1940.

TABLE IV.
INDICES OF NEGRO POPULATIONS 1940 AND 1930 CORRELATED WITH THE RATES OF
FIVE MAJOR CRIMES 1939 AND 1930, RESPECTIVELY.

Rates of Five Major Crimes 1939	Perc. Negro 1940	Rates of Five Major Crimes 1930	Perc. Negro 1930
Murder and Non-Negligent Homicide	.879 ± .031* .862 ± .043	Murder and Non-Negligent Homicide	.860 ± .039 .672 ± .107
Robbery	.515 ± .099 .268 ± .155	Robbery	.361 ± .131 .100 ± .194
Aggravated Assault	.795 ± .050 .556 ± .115	Aggravated Assault	.653 ± .086 .142 ± .192
Burglary— Breaking and Entering	.428 ± .110 .259 ± .155	Burglary— Breaking and Entering	.126 ± .148 .092 ± .194
Larceny Includes Both Over and Under \$50	.316 ± .121 .128 ± .164	Larceny Includes Both Over and Under \$50	.177 ± .146 .148 ± .192

* Upper figures—Coefficients of Correlation for Group A: Cities 100,000 to 250,000, 1940.

Lower figures—Coefficients of Correlation for Group B: Cities over 250,000, 1940.