

Black people must be concerned about and involved in all aspects of criminal "justice", not only as formulators of criminal "justice" philosophy and shapers of criminal "justice" policy. Current criminal "justice" philosophy and policy clearly do not treat Black people and other people of color equitably. Peoples of color are disproportionately represented in the United States' prison population. Peoples of color are the over whelming majority on death rows in the United States. These two facts do not mean that people of color commit more crimes than white people. However, people of color are more often imprisoned for their crimes than white people. Also, people of color commit more of the kinds of crimes that lead to imprisonment and the death penalty. This does not mean that people of color are more violent. Rather, it means that there are other factors which cause people of color to be disproportionately represented in the United States penal institutions and death rows.

Social Definition of Criminal Behavior

- 0 Criminal behavior is socially defined
- 0 Crime is defined by those who are socially and politically in power, i.e., rich, white males
- 0 The powerful define the actions of the disenfranchised as criminal, i.e., street crimes
- 0 The behavior of their social group members is not defined as criminal
- 0 The crimes of peoples of color and the poor are portrayed as being more harmful society than the crimes of the rich and powerful
- 0 African-Americans and other people of color are caught in a criminal "justice" they did not create or do not control
- 0 People of color do not have the power to influence the creation of these definitions
- 0 White collar crimes affect many more people than do street crimes

Economic Factors

- 0 African-Americans and other peoples of color are disproportionately represented among the poor
- 0 The inner cities where people of color are disproportionately represented are the turf of street criminals
- 0 People commit the crimes they have access to---people of color and poor people commit more street crimes because they do not have access to the corporate board rooms

Racism

- 0 Criminal sanctions given to violent white offenders less severe than those given to persons of color who commit similar crimes
- 0 Race of the criminal precludes certain criminal sanctions, e.g., Bernard Goetz
- 0 African-Americans and other people of color disproportionately represented on death row

Classism

- 0 Social status precludes certain criminal sanctions, e.g., Klaus Von Bulow

Systemic Change and Criminal justice reform

- 0 Every racial/class group should influence the definitions of crime
- 0 If people of color and poor people could determine criminal acts, certain behavior now defined as noncriminal would be defined as criminal, e.g., corporate crimes, rent gouging
- 0 Street crimes and other serious crimes occur disproportionately in communities of color---they are more visible
- 0 The negative effects of street crimes are more obvious than white color crimes
- 0 The systemic conditions which create these issues must be changed
- 0 Activities must be geared to working toward eliminating those conditions which contribute to people of color and poor people committing crimes, e.g., academic and vocational skills training, placement in jobs with career ladder

Abolitionism

- 0 Abolition of the prison system is morally and practically correct
- 0 Abolitionist arguments must include social justice reform
- 0 Abolitionists must work toward eliminating racism ^{and} ~~or~~ classism; if these societal problems are not eliminated, African-Americans and other peoples of color will still receive the harshest treatment