Critical Analysis of Criminal Justice Public Policy

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Author Note

Criminology Theories

“Gangs” are the criminal organizations that are formed on the streets of the United States; these organizations are still flourishing throughout the country, getting involved in many illicit activities like petty crimes to even murdering citizens for a few dollars (Dean Jones, 2004). In this essay, we will be discussing gangs from the ambit of two theories: Social Disorganization Theory and Strain theory.

Social Disorganization Theory was the brainchild of Shaw and McKay in their observation regarding urban crime and law-breaking. This theory is based on the assumption that if there are weaker bonds of integration within a group, community or society, the high rates of crime would likely occur there. Another one of the observations of this theory is that the societies that are present near posh neighborhoods are likely to develop more criminals. This is due to the general weakness of the Law and Order Apparatus in the inner-city areas. Of course, many parents and adults try to teach their offspring high moral values, but these values often count for nothing due to the presence of criminal influences in their locality. This also goes badly as such an environment results in the transfer of criminal traditions through generations. This theory contributes to the rise of criminal activities to several social anomalies such as poor housing facilities, broken families, illegitimate childbirths, low income, lack of education and jobs, among numerous others. Lack of solution related to the mentioned social problems results in drug addictions, prostitution, adult crimes and general state of mental illness within a community. The best citable example, in this case, is the favelas of Rio de Janeiro.

The start of the strain theory leads back to the various studies conducted by Merton, which were further revised by Cohen and Ohlin. Strain theory looks at the answers as to why individuals commit crimes due to certain societal strains. The most likely reason for engaging in criminal activities for an individual or a group, according to this theory, is being prevented to achieve cultural or fiscal goals through legal means. So, most people lose hope in the system and turn towards cruel and violent means for achieving their goals and dreams. Many criminologists also offer another explanation in the scope of this theory. They say that many individuals and groups strive for respect in society, for which they are motivated towards these criminal means. This theory bases its explanation on three subcultures: criminal subcultures that incite individuals to commit common theft, conflict subcultures that often result in starting violent fights, and lastly retreatist subculture that emphasizes the use of drugs. There are also high criticisms on this theory as many criminologists rightly think that crimes are not limited to these subcultures alone. Still, strain theory is considered the stepping stone of the studies conducted in criminology.

Migration Trends (1800-1930)

The United States is a nation known in the world as the land of opportunity. This has always been the state’s narrative, which in turn encouraged a rather open policy when it came to accommodation of the migrants. Sadly, all of these migrants did not contribute positively to the development of the US.

At the start of immigration to the United States, three main ethnic groups decided to move to the United States (James C Howell, 2010). These were the English, Irish and Germans. Some of the members of these ethnic communities formed an alliance of gangs, famously known as the Five Points. Some of the notorious groups in these gangs were Vly gang, the Bowery Boys, and the Broadway Boys. The rest of the two groups, Smith Fly Boys and Long Bridge Boys, were formed by Black Slaves that sought to escape the clutches of slavery that was still rampant in the south. In the early 1820s, these gangs started to establish political links that started the process of organized crime in the United States. They became so influential that many historians also contribute to the start of the New York street riots of the 1860s to these Irish criminal gangs. Luckily, the activities of these gangs were cut short due to the start of the civil war which resulted in their dissipation in the 1870s.

However, this relief was short-lived as new gangs began to emerge after the conclusion of the civil war. This was due to the other ethnic minorities that had migrated to the United States started to form their gangs. Chinese immigrants formed their organized gangs called ‘Tongs’ which dealt with illegal gambling and drug trafficking. Also, this was the time of the emergence of the most deadly and notorious criminal gangs of all time, the American Mafia, which was the brainchild of the Italians.

The Poles and the Italians were indeed the true ringleaders of the criminal undergrounds of Chicago and New York, but most of the gangs in the United States were still multiethnic, especially in the nineteenth century. This was mainly due to the lack of polarization in the neighborhoods of different ethnic groups in the American society. The Italians also managed to establish political links within Chicago. However, by the end of the 1920s, the competition for societal supremacy had reached such a point that the gangs started to engage in a kind of miniaturized warfare among themselves. The Italians would later start the concept of criminal families that would unite under the guidance of the supreme boss or Godfather as he later came to be known in the history books.

Many scholars contribute to the rise of these gangs to the societal problems that were present beforehand. Even if the problem was solved, the evil was introduced in society and had managed to entrench itself. These criminal activities may have also been the racism that was present in the American society and is still present in varying degrees, throughout the land.

# References

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