

## CHAPTER 3

### Left Realism on Inner-City Violence

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It was common in the 1990s to hear that “the economy has never been better” or that we “never had it so good,” with such supporting evidence as low official unemployment figures (Beauchesne, 1999), record profits accumulated by large corporations, a booming stock market, and a sharp increase in conspicuous consumption (e.g., buying cars, jewelry, etc.) (Hurtig, 1999). For many citizens, another good sign was an overall decrease in interpersonal violent crime. For example, the U.S. homicide rate had fallen to its lowest level in 30 years (Fox & Zawitz, 2000). Some people “credit the economy for a big drop in attacks” (Ellis, 2000:A13), while others, such as former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, attributed the decrease to aggressive policing and to increased sanction severity (Shapiro, 1999).

In response, an international community of critical criminologists say, “Get real!” They are left realists who empirically show that several major economic changes have led capitalist nations such as Canada and the United States towards a “dystopia of exclusion,” where “[t]he poor are isolated in inner-city ghettos, in orbital estates, and in ghost towns where capital originally led them then left them stranded as it winged its way elsewhere, where labor was cheaper and expectations lower” (Young, 1999:20). Left realists also show that while the overall violent crime rate may have gone down, the following structural changes have fueled a considerable amount of violence in socially and economically disadvantaged inner-city communities: the rise of the “contingent” workforce; the outmigration of people who can afford to leave poor urban communities; the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA); transnational corporations moving operations to developing countries to use cheap labor; the “suburbanization” of employment; the implementation of high technology in workplaces; and the shift from a manufacturing to a service-based economy (Alvi, DeKeseredy & Ellis, 2000; Jargowsky, 1997; Krivo, Peterson, Rizzo, & Reynolds, 1998; W. Wilson, 1987, 1996).

Consider the results of the Quality of Neighborhood Life Survey (QNLS), a study heavily influenced by two British left realist local crime surveys. The QNLS found that 19.3 percent of a sample of women ( $N = 216$ ) who lived in six public housing estates in the west end of an urban center in Eastern Ontario, Canada stated that they were victimized by at least one of 12 types of intimate partner violence in the past year (DeKeseredy, Alvi, Schwartz & Perry, 1999). This figure is higher than most of the violence against women estimates uncovered by most of the larger North American surveys that used a similar measure of violence.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Renzetti and Maier (2002) found that an alarmingly high number (33%) of poor female public housing residents in Camden, New Jersey were victimized by all varieties of violence.

It is not surprising that the rates of violence against women and other social groups (e.g., African-Americans) are so high in poor North American inner-city areas when you consider the above structural changes *and* that between 1970 and 1990, the number of U.S. people living urban ghettos, barrios, and slums grew from 4.1 million to eight million (Jargowsky, 1997). As described by Hatfield (1999) in Tables 1 and 2, things are not better in Canada even though it was ranked by the United Nations *Human Development Report* (2000) as the best nation in the world in which to live. Table 1 shows that except for Ottawa-Hull, the concentration of poor families in Canada's largest Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) has increased substantially between 1980 and 1995. Table 2 shows that a similar trend exists with neighborhood poverty rates. Thus, as in the United States, Canada is experiencing something similar to what Taylor (1999:31) refers to as "a distinctive new process of 'hyper-ghettoization'—the development of discrete urban territories where the mass of residents are permanently excluded from legitimate employment. . . ."

Table 1  
The Increasing Concentration of Poor Families in Canada's Nine Largest CMAs, 1980 to 1995<sup>2</sup>

Census Metropolitan Area	Concentration of Poor, 1980	Concentration of Poor, 1990	Concentration of Poor, 1995
Montreal	30.1%	40.1%	40.2%
Winnipeg	23.5%	39.0%	36.1%
Toronto	14.7%	21.4%	29.8%
Ottawa-Hull	27.5%	24.1%	28.4%
Hamilton	21.6%	24.9%	27.9%
Quebec City	20.8%	26.6%	25.3%
Edmonton	4.1%	28.3%	18.8%
Vancouver	7.2%	15.5%	13.7%
Calgary	6.4%	20.3%	8.7%

Table 2  
Increasing Neighborhood Poverty Rates in Canada's Nine Largest CMAs,  
1980 to 1995<sup>3</sup>

Census Metropolitan Area	Neighborhood Poverty Rate, 1980	Neighborhood Poverty Rate, 1990	Neighborhood Poverty Rate, 1995
Montreal	14.0	20.4	21.3
Winnipeg	9.0	15.7	14.0
Toronto	4.7	7.9	13.6
Ottawa-Hull	10.0	8.4	10.4
Hamilton	8.1	7.9	10.8
Quebec City	9.0	11.2	11.2
Edmonton	1.6	12.8	7.8
Vancouver	2.5	6.1	6.7
Calgary	2.2	8.9	3.5

In sum, the reality is that despite rhetoric from politicians, academics, and others with a vested stake in maintaining the status quo, North American poverty has increased markedly over the past two decades and the poor are still highly vulnerable to violent victimization. On top of that, people located at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, especially those in inner-city areas, are subject to "a staggering degree of discrimination . . . at all levels of the criminal justice system" (National Council of Welfare, 2000:1). These are concrete problems taken seriously by left realists such as Jock Young, Elliott Currie, Brian MacLean, and William Julius Wilson. The main objective of this chapter is to describe and assess their scholarly and policy contributions. It is to their theoretical work that I turn first.

### Left Realist Theory

Although there are variations in left realist theory, all versions start with the assertion that inner-city violence is a major problem for socially and economically disenfranchised people, regardless of their sex or ethnic/cultural background. This position is sharply attacked by those whom Currie (1992) refers to as "progressive minimalists." These are critical criminologists and liberals who downplay the seriousness and extent of such violence because of either the fear of pathologizing the poor, "whipping up" support for severe punishment, and supporting racist arguments or "because of a concern of being charged with 'racism' or with 'blaming the victim' . . ." (W. Wilson, 1987:6). For minimalists, the criminal justice system is more problematic than is crime itself (Young, 1998), and the widespread fear of and concern about crime is a function of a moral panic fueled by a coalition of politicians, law enforcement personnel, and journalists used to obtain support for a social order detrimental to the disenfranchised and the construction of a socialist society (Chambliss, 1994; Reiman, 1998).

African-Americans are much more likely to be victims of "America's imprisonment binge" than are members of the dominant culture (Irwin & Austin, 1997). This does not mean, however, that crime victimization is not a serious problem for inner-city black communities. For example, despite a drop of about 36 percent in the past few years, homicide is the leading cause of death for African-American males aged 15 to 34 (Cook & Moore, 1999). African-American young men aged 18 to 24 had homicide victimization rates about eight times higher than that for the same aged white males or African-American females, and more than 34 times higher than that for white females (Fox & Zawitz, 2000). Obviously, homicide "is not a democratic crime" (Cook & Moore, 1999). No wonder some researchers define homicide within the African-American community as a major public health issue (e.g., O'Carroll & Mercy, 1986). Others, such as Mann (1993:46), refers to black homicide as "a form of black genocide, since the victim of homicide is most often another black person and the incidence of this crime is so pervasive."

Think about the frightening results of Schwartz, Grisso, and Miles' (1994) western Philadelphia study. Conducted over a four-year period (1987 through 1990) in 17 census tracts, it found that 40 percent of young African-American males suffered violent assaults that required them to go to a hospital emergency room. Surely such high rates of interpersonal violence must be a major concern for many inner-city residents in the United States. They certainly are from a European perspective, as left realist Jock Young (1998) correctly points out. Because most Canadians live within 200 miles of the U.S. border and frequently cross it for business and pleasure, they too are deeply concerned about the levels of violence that plague U.S. urban areas and other parts of the country. Who would not know that by the mid-1990s, a young U.S. male was 37 times more likely to be a victim of homicide than an English youth, 12 times more likely than a Canadian youth, 20 times more likely than a Swede, 26 more likely than a young French male, and over 60 times more likely than his Japanese counterpart (Currie, 1998)? Unfortunately, there are still "too many well-meaning progressives" who "simply do not get it when it comes" to the problem of violence and other serious criminal harms in U.S. cities (Currie, 1992:92). More concerned with crimes by the powerful, they refuse to acknowledge socially and economically disadvantaged people's legitimate fear of inner-city crime and their desire to end it.

Left realists, like other critical criminologists, also view poverty as a powerful determinant of muggings, armed robbery, sexual assault, wife-beating, and so on. However, most poor people do not commit these crimes. This is why left realist criminologists contend that relative poverty rather than absolute poverty is the key to understanding violent crime (Lea & Young, 1984; Young, 1999). Absolute poverty refers to a family or person's inability to buy basic necessities (e.g., food, shelter, clothing), while relative poverty is defined in relation to a society's mean or median income. Thus,

if your income is at the bottom end of the income distribution, you are poor regardless of your absolute income (Devine & Wright, 1993).

According to left realists, it is not the inability to buy a DIRECTV satellite dish or other "glittering prizes of capitalism" that motivates people to commit crime. Rather, it is a "lethal combination" of relative deprivation and individualism (Young, 1999). For example, poverty experienced as unfair (relative deprivation when compared to someone else) breeds discontent (Lea & Young, 1984). Individualism leads such discontent to foster "Hobbesian jungles" of the urban poor (Young, 1999), a "universe where human beings live side by side but not as human beings" (Hobsbawm, 1994:341). Crime, then, is an unjust individualistic "solution" to the "experience of injustice" (Young, 1998). However, it is important to note that such experienced injustice, combined with an individualistic solution, occurs throughout society (Young, 1998). Crime is certainly not "ghetto-specific" (W. Wilson, 1996). After all, many affluent people use illicit drugs, beat their wives, and sexually assault their dating partners. Still, because of the structural changes described previously (e.g., deindustrialization), many poor ghetto residents cannot find work and thus have little reason to refrain from criminal activity. This is the key reason why interpersonal violence, drug dealing, illicit drug use, and other crimes occur with greater frequency in ghettos, barrios, and slums (W. Wilson, 1996).

Left realists also argue that people who lack legitimate means of solving the problem of relative deprivation may come into contact with other frustrated disenfranchised people and form subcultures, which, in turn, encourage and legitimate criminal behaviors. For example, receiving respect from peers is highly valued among ghetto adolescents who are denied status in mainstream, middle-class society. However, respect and status is often granted by inner-city subcultures when one is willing to be violent, such as using an assault rifle (Messerschmidt, 1993).

A cautionary note about ghetto-based criminal subcultures is required here. They should not be construed as "somehow alien to the wider culture" (Young, 1999:86), which is what culture of poverty theorists like Lewis (1966) and Banfield (1974) do. The truth is that they, like most North Americans, want to achieve the "American Dream" and its related status but lack the legitimate means of doing so (Messner & Rosenfeld, 1997). For example, the Puerto Rican drug dealers Bourgois (1995) studied in East Harlem, New York City are a core element of U.S. culture. In fact, criminal subcultures like this one are "based on all-American notions of work as an area of rugged individualism and competition and sanctioned by a film industry which carries the message of didactic violence. . . ." (Young, 1999:87).

According to Bourgois:

Like most other people in the United States, drug dealers and street criminals are scrambling to obtain their piece of the pie as fast as possible. In fact, in their pursuit of success they are even fol-

lowing the minute details of the classical yankee model for upward mobility. They are aggressively pursuing careers as private entrepreneurs; they take risks, work hard, and pray for good luck. They are the ultimate rugged individualists braving an unpredictable frontier where fortune, fame, and destruction are all around the corner, and where the enemy is ruthlessly hunted down and shot (1995:326).

### *Criticisms of Left Realist Theory*

Left realist theory is criticized on several grounds, especially by feminist scholars. For example, although left realism embraces elements of radical and socialist feminism, as evident in several local victimization surveys conducted in the United Kingdom (e.g., Jones, MacLean & Young, 1986), there is no attempt to theorize women's experiences of crime as suspects, offenders, defendants, and inmates (Carlen, 1992). The issues of why women's offenses are distinct from men's and the sexist nature of the criminal justice system are also given short shrift. These are valid criticisms because left realists' theoretical work on the relationship between gender and violence has focused mainly on male-to-female victimization in domestic/household settings and in public spaces. Still, their analysis of this major problem is deemed by some critics to be problematic because they have not developed and tested theories of male patriarchal domination and control over women (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1991). This is likely to change soon as we are seeing new left realist literature that addresses this concern.

Take, for example, Young's recent attempt to explain the relationship between relative deprivation, individualism, "macho" subcultural dynamics, and violence against women. Seen as a result of exclusion and inclusion, he (1999:13-14) argues that this form of woman abuse:

can be caused by relative deprivation and by clashes among individuals demanding equality and others resisting them. Of course, where both relative deprivation and individualism occur together as in the macho-culture of lower class, young unemployed males when confronting the demands for equality of women, often in poorly paid yet steady employment, one would expect a particularly high rate of conflict, often resulting in the preference for setting up home separately and the preponderance of single mothers. Indeed this latter group have the highest rates of violence against them, usually from ex-partners.

Left realists have also been criticized for not explaining crimes of the powerful, such as corporate crime, white-collar crime, and political crime (Henry, 1999). In its current form, left realist theory cannot do so because it is restricted to interpersonal relations between economically and socially disenfranchised individuals (Pearce & Tombs, 1992). This is not to say,

however, that left realists only advance what Henry (1999:138-139) refers to as a "narrow, common-sense concept of crime" that excludes "hidden victims of the structurally powerful." If this is the case, then why do British left realists John Lea and Jock Young (1984) contend that working class people are victimized from all directions and that a "double thrust" against both street crime and "suite crime" is necessary? Further, left realism "notes that the more vulnerable a person is economically and socially the more likely it is that both working class and white collar crime will occur against them; that one sort of crime tends to compound another as does one social problem another" (Young, 1986:23-24).

Although some criminologists have tried (e.g., Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990), to the best of my knowledge no one has developed a theory that can adequately explain all types of crime. If this is a major shortcoming, then the theoretical work of many who attack left realists for devoting most of their attention to crimes of the powerless should also be considered flawed. For example, most of the people who criticize left realists for ignoring crimes of the powerful do exactly the opposite: only look at crimes of the structurally powerful but not crimes of the "truly disadvantaged" (W. Wilson, 1987). This, too, is a one-sided, narrow approach, and it inhibits the development of progressive alternative policies aimed at curbing predatory street crime, woman abuse, and other crimes that plague poor inner-city areas. Neglecting to deal with these harms allows right-wing politicians to manufacture ideological support for "get-tough" policies that will never make ghettos, barrios, and slums safer.

There are several other criticisms of left realist theory and because they are well documented elsewhere,<sup>4</sup> they will not be repeated here. Many more new ones are likely to emerge too, given that left realists are constantly modifying their theoretical contributions in accordance with rapid changes now occurring in societies such as Canada and the United States.

## Left Realist Policy Proposals

Left realists based in Europe, Australia, Canada, the United States, and elsewhere offer many different crime control and prevention policies. Even so, all left realists have two things in common. First, although they would all like to see a major transformation from a society based on class, race/ethnic, and gender inequality to one that is truly equitable and democratic, they realize that this will not happen in the immediate future. This view is well founded, given that there is massive public support for neo-conservative governments and their economic and social policies (e.g., government cuts to unemployment insurance),<sup>5</sup> a major anti-feminist backlash, widespread resistance to affirmative action programs, and other indicators that social injustice is deeply entrenched in North America. So, left realists seek short-term gains while remaining committed to long-term change. This is why they

propose practical initiatives that can be implemented immediately and that "chip away" at patriarchal capitalism.

Second, all left realists are sharply opposed to policies heavily informed by what Young (1998) defines as "establishment criminology." Establishment criminologists see crime as a property of the individual rather than of broader social, cultural, economic, and political forces. Take Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990:90), two widely read and cited administrative criminologists who assert that people lacking self-control are more likely to commit crime because they "tend to be impulsive, insensitive, physical (as opposed to mental), risk taking, short-sighted, and non-verbal. . . ." Then there are more extreme others, such as the highly controversial J. Philippe Rushton (1999) who contends that African-Americans are more biologically predisposed to committing crime than are whites and Asians.

Once referred to by some critical criminologists as "right realists" (Young, 1996), another group of establishment criminologists (e.g., Dennis, 1997; Kelling & Coles, 1997; J. Wilson, 1985), while seeing crime as determined by forces within individuals (e.g., individuals choose to commit crime), view searching for causes of crime as a "distraction and a waste of their valuable time" (Platt & Takagi, 1981:45). According to them, energy and time would be better spent improving the ability of the criminal justice system to deter people from committing crimes, with the ultimate goal of decreasing the rewards of crime by increasing the costs.

Regardless of how they explain crime, all establishment criminologists call for policies aimed at deterring people from stealing, mugging, raping, etc. As you can imagine, this means such policies as bringing back chain gangs as was done in Arizona and Alabama, enacting "Three Strikes and You're Out" legislation for repeat offenders, implementing the "Broken Windows" approach to policing (Kelling & Coles, 1997),<sup>6</sup> and using other "get-tough" strategies. Such simplistic solutions are prime examples of "bad ideas," which are the key hurdles in the search for effective or sensible crime policies (Walker, 1998). For example, there is no conclusive evidence showing that incarcerating many people leads to major reductions in crime.<sup>7</sup> This is because solutions like this one disregard the broader structural aspects of society that create an atmosphere in which crimes are committed. In the case of violence, this includes high youth unemployment, extreme levels of social inequality and poverty, and the lack of meaningful jobs for many people.

Thus, left realists call for a "broader vision" (W. Wilson, 1996), which prioritizes social policy over criminal justice. This is not to say, however, that they are opposed to criminal justice reform. For example, British left realists call for strategies such as democratic control of policing and community participation in crime prevention and policy development (Kinsey, Lea & Young, 1986; Lea & Young, 1984). These initiatives can, to a small extent, help curb violence and other crimes, but they alone do little, if anything, to address the social causes of crime. It leaves criminal justice personnel as groundskeepers brought in to "clean up the mess" made by the rest of society (Currie, 1985).

This is why left realists emphasize the implementation of a broad range of short-term initiatives aimed at reducing poverty and unemployment, curbing violence against women, and building strong communities.

Below are some examples of progressive policies that can help lower poverty and unemployment rates:<sup>8</sup>

- Job creation and training programs, including publicly supported community-oriented job creation.
- A higher minimum wage level.
- Government sponsored day care so that poor single parents can work without the bulk of their paychecks going to pay for child care. Some unemployed single parents today do not look for work because they cannot afford child care.
- Housing assistance, which not only helps poor people in general, but also enables abused women and children to escape their environments without ending up destitute and on the streets. Consider Zorza's (1991) study, which suggests that 50 percent of homeless women and children ended up this way after escaping abuse.
- Introducing entrepreneurial skills into the high school curriculum.
- Creating linkages between schools, private business, and government agencies.
- Universal health care.

As expected, conservatives viciously attack strategies like these. For example, many agree with Charles Murray's (1984) assertion that social programs like universal day and health care increase poverty and crime by contributing to the development of a welfare-dependent and deviant subculture. There is no scientific evidence for this "theory," which is not surprising given that it is little more than conservative ideology "dressed up in social scientific regalia" (Devine & Wright, 1993:125). Still, Murray's (1984) arguments are strongly supported by conservative politicians and have been put into practice throughout North America.

Some progressives have also raised concerns about policies located in the welfare state. Tomaszewski (1999:242), for example, reminds us that in capitalist societies, state-sponsored social services (e.g., unemployment insurance) are not intended to eliminate inequality, but rather to "pacify the truly disadvantaged and prevent civil disorder." He urges left realists such as Wilson (1996) to think about the dangers associated with the complex relationship between governments and capitalist societies. For the most part, a capitalist state is there to buttress capitalism and will not threaten the gains made by corporate and political elites under the current unequal political economic order. This is a valid point. Nevertheless, again, something needs to be done now because the revolution is not around the corner. Further, there is evidence that some left realist work has made a major difference.

Consider Basran, Charan, and MacLean's (1995) local survey of corporate violence against Punjabi farmworkers and their children. This study influenced Kwantlen University College and the British Columbia government in Canada to provide suitable and affordable child care for Punjabi farmworkers. This is definitely not a means of strengthening inequality so that people can continue working under capitalism. Rather it is one of several "realistic solutions to distorted social conditions" (Devine & Wright, 1993).

Poverty is a key determinant of male-to-female violence against women and such violence pushes many women into poverty.<sup>9</sup> Violence against women is also one of the key factors associated with female crime, such as prostitution (Chesney-Lind, 1997; DeKeseredy, 2000b). Recognizing these problems, several North American left realists (e.g., DeKeseredy, Schwartz, & Alvi, 2000) are heavily informed by work done by members of the pro-feminist men's movement (e.g., Funk, 1993). Pro-feminist men collectively and individually confront expressions of sexism, support survivors of woman abuse, protest pornography, confront abusive men, and do a long list of other practical things aimed at making women's lives safer.

Do these strategies work? This is an empirical question that can only be answered empirically. So far, to the best of my knowledge, no one has systematically evaluated the effectiveness of pro-feminist men's efforts. Still, it is fair to assume that these initiatives alone will not do much. They have to be combined with other approaches, such as education, media campaigns, police intervention, and strategies aimed at curbing other forms of structured social inequality. The good news is, however, that a growing number of men are getting involved in the practical struggle to stop all forms of woman abuse, which is defined by some progressives as a major success and a sign of change (Thorne-Finch, 1992).

Crime cannot be solely attributed to one's position in the socioeconomic hierarchy or to an individual's terrifying experiences with intimate violence. Although these are two major determinants of inner-city violence, homicide, bank robbery, muggings, wife beating, and other serious aggressive acts are also functions of neighborhood or community social and organizational characteristics. For example, urban neighborhoods characterized by collective efficacy have lower crime rates than those that are not (Sampson, Raudenbush & Earls, 1997). Collective efficacy refers to "mutual trust among neighbors combined with a willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good, specifically to supervise children and maintain public order" (Sampson, Raudenbush & Earls 1998:1). A growing body of research on the relationship between collective efficacy and crime shows that the community—not the police or other social control agents—curbs crime. It is people who live in places where neighbors can depend on each other for social support and informal means of social control (DeLeon-Granados, 1999).

The above arguments and collective efficacy research were not developed by people who identify themselves as left realists. Nevertheless, their contributions are consistent with left realist views about the role of the com-

munity in crime prevention, which is why they are briefly reviewed here. Still, some inner-city communities are so shattered by poverty, joblessness, "market-generated geographic mobility" (Michalowski, 1991), and host of other social problems that it is highly unlikely that people living in these areas will work closely together to eliminate or reduce violence. For example, collective efficacy was low in Chicago communities with high levels of concentrated poverty (Sampson et al., 1998). This is why informal community-based means of social control should not be substitutes for economic strategies and help from the welfare state (Currie, 1985; Sampson et al., 1998). Collective efficacy will only exist when there are enough meaningful jobs and effective social programs.

## Conclusion

Jock Young (1999) is correct to point out that North Americans and many Europeans now live in exclusive societies. These are societies where an alarming number of people are excluded from the formal labor market, where thousands of people have to live on the streets or in dilapidated public housing estates, and where inner-city violence is endemic. What is to be done about violence in poor urban areas characterized by social and economic exclusion? The first thing to do is to take it seriously, which is what many progressive criminologists are reluctant to do for reasons described previously. The second step is to provide short-term progressive solutions that prioritize social change over draconian criminal justice initiatives.

Left realists take these steps that not only help curb inner-city violence, but also enhance many people's economic, psychological, and physical well-being, as well as contribute to the development of strong, cohesive, and vibrant communities. Still, left realism has several pitfalls, as do all schools of criminological thought. Perhaps, however, left realists' biggest problem is convincing politicians and the general public that their policy proposals are effective and necessary. Unfortunately, the number of North Americans who support right-wing agendas is markedly higher than the number of progressives who embrace the alternative solutions advanced here. In addition to saying that left realist strategies will not work because crime is an individual—not a social—problem, supporters of neo-conservative policies (e.g., imprisonment) argue that left realist initiatives are expensive and the money would be better spent lowering the nation's deficit. But, if money has not been too tight to build new prisons, then money can be found to reduce poverty, unemployment, and a host of other social problems strongly related to crime if that is what people want. Government spending is always directly related to political priorities, and what we need now is a radical readjustment in thinking about our priorities.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See Gelles (2000) and DeKeseredy (2000a) for descriptions of the data uncovered by these and other major violence against women surveys.
- <sup>2</sup> Informed by Jargowsky (1997:20), Hatfield refers to the "concentration of the poor" as "the percentage of a metropolitan area's poor population that resides in high-poverty neighborhoods."
- <sup>3</sup> Following Jargowsky (1997:20), Hatfield defined the "neighborhood poverty rate" as "the percentage of a metropolitan area's total population that resides in . . . high poverty census tracts." However, family rather than individual low-income rates were used because the latter are not available in the 1991 census, from which the some of the data presented in this table are drawn.
- <sup>4</sup> For more detailed critiques of left realism, see DeKeseredy (1996), Henry (1999), Matthews and Young (1992), Michalowski, (1991), Ruggiero (1992), Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1991), Sim, Scraton, and Gordon (1987), and Taylor (1992).
- <sup>5</sup> For example, in Canada, 61 percent of unemployed people do not receive unemployment insurance even though the federal government has accumulated a \$26 billion Employment Insurance surplus that is growing by \$5 billion a year (Beauchesne, 2000).
- <sup>6</sup> Briefly, this involves police officers taking an aggressive response to relatively minor crimes, such as graffiti-spraying, panhandling, and public drunkenness. The idea is that such behavior left unattended gives the impression that no one cares, which leads to more serious crime.
- <sup>7</sup> See Currie (1998) for a recent and powerful in-depth critique of incarceration.
- <sup>8</sup> For more information on these strategies, see Alvi, DeKeseredy, and Ellis (2000), Currie (1985, 1993, 1998), DeKeseredy (2000b), and W. Wilson (1996).
- <sup>9</sup> See DeKeseredy (2000b) and Ptacek (1999) for reviews of the literature on the relationship between poverty and violence against women.

## Discussion Questions

1. What are the structural changes that have contributed to high rates of violence in socially and economically disadvantaged inner-city communities?
2. Why is homicide the leading cause of death for African-American males aged 15 to 24?
3. What is the difference between relative and absolute poverty?
4. What, according to left realists, motivates poor inner-city people to commit violent crime?

5. Why can left-realist theory not explain corporate crime?
6. Describe feminist criticisms of left-realist theory.
7. Provide some examples of policies proposed by establishment criminologists.
8. Provide some examples of left-realist policies aimed at lowering poverty and unemployment rates.
9. Why do neighborhoods characterized by collective efficacy have lower crime rates than those that are not?
10. Why are left realist policies not well received by politicians and the general public?