

About the Chapter

The Color of Justice by Samuel Walker, in chapter two, analyzes offenders and the often-overlooked victims of crimes. Walker puts an emphasis on what the “typical” offenders and victims look like while also incorporating different statistics to debunk these preconceived ideas and images of offenders and victims.

Racial Hoax

Walker begins the chapter by outlining an event reported by a white female in September of 2010. The alleged offender was described as a black female that had supposedly thrown acid onto her face. The story was found to be fabricated and the accusations made by the white female are now seen as a use of the “mad black woman imagery.” The use of this imagery shows how Americans tend to link crime and race together, largely due to the way victims and offenders are both portrayed by the media. This is a perfect example of a racial hoax, a situation when some individual lies about a crime and falsely blames a person for the crime merely because of their race. A racial hoax can also be when a real crime is committed but a person is falsely accused because of their race.

Hoaxes typically receive extensive media coverage as they are often big, attention grabbing headlines. From a statistical standpoint, 70% of racial hoaxes are a Caucasian man or woman accusing an African American man or woman with a crime. Although charges may be pressed for filing false police reports, less than 50% of the accusers actually are charged for the crime.

Race and Gender of Victims

There are three primary factors of a crime that draw attention: the type of crime committed, the type of person that committed the crime, and the type of person that was a victim of the crime. The media, for example, is known for covering violent crimes more than property crimes even though violent crimes only make up 10% of crime in the United States. Another example of misleading media coverage is the constant coverage of crime suggesting that crime is climbing when it is dropping.

Not only is crime coverage biased, but the missing persons reports are biased, too. Missing white women are far more likely to draw attention than missing women of color. This bias is proven in the text, as Walker groups missing women into three pairs. Each pair included one white woman and one woman of color, and the women of each group were linked either by time, location, and/or occupation. In each set of events, the missing white women received substantially more media coverage and urgency.

A Broader Picture of the Victim

Modern assumptions of crime include the idea that most crimes are violent, the victim is white, and the assailant is a person of color. In reality, people of color are more likely to be victims of crimes than whites.

Household Victimization

Household victimization is the rate at which crimes are committed against a household by way of property crimes. The racial and ethnic group with the lowest household victimization rate is the “other” category composed of Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, Alaskan Natives, and Native Americans. The second lowest rate belongs to the whites (although burglary is higher individually), and the next lowest is the African American group. The group with the highest

victimization rate is one that is unique, for the most part, to the National Crime Victimization Survey: the multiracial group. The NCVS is one of the few surveys that allow the selection of two or more races, and it displays the fact that household victimization is greatest within this group.

Effects of Urbanization

Household victimization rates can be broken up not only by race, but also by urbanization. Viewing the rates by urbanization would simply include adding a “subcategory” of urbanization before then breaking it into race and ethnicity inside of said urbanization. The categories include urban, suburban, and rural areas. Further breaking the effects of urbanization down by race and ethnicity shows which groups face more or less victimization in which areas.

In urban areas, the African American and white groups share the greatest rate of victimization. In rural areas the highest rate belongs to the “other” group (particularly the Hispanic population) while the lowest rural rate surprisingly belongs to the African Americans. In the suburbs, though, victimization rates are greater among African Americans. Furthermore, violent crime victimization as a whole typically increases from urban, to suburban, and then to rural areas, but there are prominent exceptions to this when it comes to people of color. Walker introduces the question of, “Why is this,” before suggesting a reason: introducing racially diverse populations into less diverse populations is seen as a potential threat (Walker, 2012, p. 48).

Personal Victimization

When it comes to the violent victimization rates presented by the NCVS, African Americans have higher rates than whites or the “other” group, but their rate is not the highest overall. Statistically, multiracial individuals are more likely to be victims of violent crimes than any other group. In fact, the rate differential is substantial compared to every other racial and

ethnic group. Per 1,000 people, African Americans average 24.3 victims, 19.9 for whites, 11.4 for the other groups, and 73.8 for multiracial people. That is merely an overview of all violent crimes. The multi-race group has an astronomically higher rate in every category, including rape, other than theft.

Lifetime Likelihood of Crime

Looking at crime victimization rates over a lifetime are potentially more effective than looking at victimization rates over a year's time. For instance, instead of looking at the statistic that says 16 of every 10,000 females are raped annually, this strategy would look at the statistic that states one of every twelve females are raped throughout their lifetimes. Lifetime likelihoods can also be split into race and ethnicity, although the book looks at only the whites and African Americans.

Statistically, 87% of African Americans are victims of violent crime at some point in their lifetimes while the number drops to 82% for whites. Robbery is at 51% for African Americans but a mere 27% for whites, and rape is at 11% for African Americans and 8% for whites. Assault, though, shows a 1% difference between African Americans and whites, with more whites being victims. Personal theft is evened out at about 99% for each group.

Homicide Victimization

Young African American males are at the greatest risk of homicide in the United States. As of 2008 African Americans only accounted for 15% of the population of the country, but over 47.7% of homicide victims belonged to this racial group. A 2002 survey showed African Americans are six times more likely to be murdered than whites, while African American males are eight times more likely to be killed than white men and twenty-four times more likely than white females.

When it comes to the means of the murders, there is a relation between race and type of murder. Though gun murders seem to be even between African Americans and whites, whites are more often victims of murder from arson, poison, sex crimes, and gang crimes. African Americans are more often victims of drug-related homicides.

Picture of the Typical Offender

Many Americans view the typical offender as a young African American male. This could be due to the media giving the most attention to street crimes such as murder, robbery, and rape, crimes that African Americans are arrested at a higher rate for. This group is arrested for 50.1% of murders and 32.2% of rapes, an overrepresentation considering the comparatively small number of African Americans in this country. Despite the overrepresentation, these crimes occur less often than most other crimes. It is important to remember that the above numbers are arrest percentages. There are many crimes never reported to authorities, and if they are reported, there is no guarantee an arrest takes place.

Arrest Data

In 2008, over two thirds of those arrested were white and less than one third were African Americans. Violent crimes resulted in the arrest of a white man or woman in over 50% of the incidents. The only crimes that African Americans often committed were murder, robbery, and gambling. The murder statistic is alarming, however, especially considering that males between the ages of 18 and 24 are nine times more likely to commit murder than his white counterpart. Despite starting major crimes at an earlier age, African Americans stop committing major crimes at a younger age than their white counterparts as well.

Drug Offenders

African American twelfth graders, of all the different racial and ethnic groups, have the lowest rate of both licit and illicit drug use while the drug use of white twelfth graders was the highest. These drugs include marijuana, powder cocaine, inhalants, LSD, and oxycontin. Hispanic twelfth graders have the highest use of drugs such as crystal meth and heroin. Crack use is also highest in the Hispanic group as it ranks right above the white group. When it comes to Native Americans, drug use starts at an earlier age than any of racial or ethnic group, and Natives use inhalants more often than the other groups.

Interracial Hate Crimes

Hate crimes are described as crimes that are committed that include the use of racially derogatory language, the displaying of a hate symbol, and a confirmed hate crime report by law enforcement. A 2008 study shows that Natives identify whites as the primary assailants of hate crimes. This could explain why Native Americans commit crimes against whites at a high rate, but it does not explain why they offend African Americans at a similar rate. The idea of whites being hate crime offenders is not only existent between the Native Americans as Asian Americans feel the same way. Asian Americans, though, have a higher offense rate against African Americans more than any other group.

Of all hate crimes, 55% take place due to someone's race, approximately 31% takes place due to association with a person of a different race (such as interracial marriage), and 29% tend to be a result of ethnicity. African Americans are identified as offenders in a mere 15% of criminal cases, with African Americans identifying whites as offenders of crimes over 85% of the time.

Ethnic Youth Gangs

Gangs are typically associated and organized along racial and ethnic lines, although they are not always organized this way. There are many reasons for gangs to develop, some of which being a difficulty “fitting in” with American culture by groups such as the Asian Americans and a search for loyalty and a brotherhood/sisterhood such as in Hispanic gangs. Despite white gangs being somewhat synonymous with white supremacy, only one “gang” is composed of white supremacists, the Skinheads. White gangs, though, are the only gangs that adulthood recruitment is prominent. The adulthood recruitment is often in prisons.

References

Walker, S., Spohn, C., & Miriam, D. (2012). *The Color of Justice* (^{1st} ed.). Belmont, California:
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