

# Explication of Black Crime 'Wrongheaded'

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By Röderick Bush

White professionals have a funny way of calling us niggers. They camouflage the insult in so many bogus intellectual concepts that it leaves some of us unsure about whether we have been insulted.

But let there be no mistake about it, Jack Cashill's one-sided, ahistorical, subjective, racist article on black crime is not only an insult but also an attack on poor black people. (Mr. Cashill's article, "Black Crime: 'Prosperity the Root Ill,'" appeared in Forum on Sunday, July 17.) It is about time for black people to understand what the deal is and why white social scientists are trying to place the onus for widespread crime on black people.

For Jack Cashill as an individual it might be as simple as that this is a new vogue in the social services field and Cashill is trying to make a name for himself. But this is not an individual matter. Historically white supremacist ideology has been supported by pseudoscientific theories. Edward Banfield, William Shockley, Daniel P. Moynihan and Arthur Jensen are the most popular current proponents of such theories.

Cashill's article on black crime, whatever his intentions, objectively serves the function of justifying the criminal oppression of black people and concealing the forces that are primarily responsible for widespread crime in our society.

Cashill makes this point very clearly. Social conditions are not tied to black crime, he says; the difficulty is both profound and internal. He implies that the root of the problem is the black psyche or the collective expression of the black psyche: Modern black culture (which, he says, is "hell-bent on self-destruction"). This is blaming the victim, pure and simple. When he explains that "this is the flush moment in the history of the world and probably the fairest," the outlines of the cover-up that is being perpetrated become clearer.

His definition of the good life is the heart of Cashill's wrongheaded views on black crime and, paradoxically, the ideological basis of most crime. Cashill blatantly distorts the nature of black poverty in our society by erroneously comparing blacks to the oppressed masses of Asia, Africa and Latin America. He does not understand, or refuses to see, that poverty must be determined within the context

of a particular society. His "good life" is defined solely by the amount of material things possessed by people. He then says blacks should cease seeking the "good life" as defined by the society in which we live. Cashill cannot have it both ways.

Samir Amin, director of the U.N.-sponsored African Institute for Economic Development and Planning, has pointed out that "the true religion of capitalist society is 'economism,' or, in everyday terms, the worship of money, the cult of consumption for its own sake without regard to needs. The entire crisis of present-day civilization lies here, in so far as this ideology shortens the time prospect of society, making it lose sight of its future."

Marx and Engels were even more incisive: "The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly destroyed the motley feudal ties that bound man to his 'natural superiors,' and has left remaining no other interaction between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment.' . . . It has resolved personal worth into exchange value and, in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single unconscionable freedom—Free Trade."

None of this is to condone the activities of the petty thugs who victimize a black community that is already beset by a variety of parasites (as one of Woody Guthrie's songs points out: "Some rob you with a 6-gun, some with a fountain pen.")

To deal effectively with black crime, however, it is necessary to look at it within a historical, social, economic, political, psychological and cultural context. Cashill's reduction of black crime to only psychological and cultural causes may serve to justify the racism that pervades American society, but it does not help us to come to grips with the problem of crime. It is an approach based on tunnel vision.

With the decline of feudal Europe, bands of bandits roamed the countryside attacking caravans going to and from the Crusades. When these bandits were successful in their plundering they accumulated wealth and became the first small capitalists. Thus the capitalist system drew some of its earliest entrepreneurs from among the ranks of thieves. U.S. history is partly the story of the rise to power of one successful crook after another—from the first settlers who robbed and murdered the natives, to the land barons of the West who plundered their fellow settlers, to the robber

barons like the Astors, the Morgans and the Rockefellers. Of course the most brutal crime of American history was the mass kidnaping, enslavement, rape and murder of the Africans who provided the slave labor upon which was built much of the early wealth of the ruling class.

In order to reproduce itself the capitalist system strives to build society in the image of the capitalist class. Capitalists put themselves forward as an example to be emulated. What this basically means is that to grow fat from someone else's labor is the highest value. To look out for No. 1, to step on the other person to get to the top, is admired. On the other hand, to work for a living, especially in a factory or in other low-status jobs, to be a productive member of society, to produce its material wealth, is not admired.

These values are at the heart of the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production. The system is based on the legalized robbery of the working class and of the masses of people in Asia, Africa and Latin America by a handful of parasites. To live, working people must sell their ability to work, their labor power, to the capitalists for a fraction of the value that they produce. The remainder is surplus value and is appropriated by the capitalists in the form of profit. The appropriation by the capitalists of the surplus value produced by the workers is thievery pure and simple. Further, since all businesses must strive for maximum profits in order to stay in business, this means maximum exploitation of the working class and manipulation of consumers (advertising, unfair terms of trade, etc.).

Although rights of property are protected, the capitalist system does not guarantee economic security to most of its individual members. Individuals must fend for themselves, finding the best available opportunities to provide for themselves and their families. Obviously, at any given time, many of the best opportunities for economic survival or advancement open to different persons will violate some laws. Driven by the fear of economic insecurity and by a competitive desire to gain some of the goods unequally distributed throughout the society, many individuals will employ criminal means. Thus most crimes in capitalist society are alike because they constitute functionally similar responses to the organization of capitalist institutions. Those crimes help provide a means of survival in a society in which survival is never assured. The "legiti-

mate" jobs open to many ghetto residents, especially young black males typically pay low wages, offer relatively demeaning assignments and carry the constant risk of layoff. In contrast, many kinds of crime available in the ghetto often bring higher monetary return and higher social status.

Crime, however, is not primarily the province of young, lower-class, black males. In their drive for profit, companies murder and maim hundreds of thousands of workers a year on unsafe machinery, steal industrial secrets from one another and sell the cheapest, shoddiest products the market will bear. The oil companies threatened to cut off the heat to millions in the midst of arctic weather until their higher prices were forthcoming—extortion on a scale that the Mafia would never dream of. An investigation found that one-half of Chicago's car repair garages cheated their customers by charging for unneeded repairs. Recent history has really opened our eyes to the extent of bribery and corruption among politicians and the police. Functionally, these are the same response.

Frank Pearce, in "Crimes of the Powerful," points out that evidence collected by the federal government clearly shows that the emphasis on lower-class crime is misplaced. "Using the government's own criteria of the cost of crime to the community, burglary, an 'index crime' for the FBI, is surprisingly insignificant. The \$284 million worth of goods stolen in 1965 represents only 3 per cent of the estimated annual profits of 'organized crime' (conventionally defined), and only 3 per cent of the money gained by the tax frauds of the wealthiest 1 per cent in 1957."

Sen. Warren Magnuson has pointed out that deceptive selling is the most serious form of theft, accounting for more dollars lost each year than robbery, larceny, car thefts, embezzlement and forgery combined. On an international scale it is clearly documented that the CIA participated in the overthrow of many legitimate governments and that the U.S. government has aggressively initiated bloody wars to maintain its empire (e.g. the Spanish-American, Korean and Vietnamese wars).

I could go on, but let's face it, Jack, black crime is just the tip of the iceberg. I understand that you earn your 30 pieces of silver by diverting our attention from the real issues. But many of us already have our eyes fixed on the whole iceberg.