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CRIME AND CRIMINALS

OPPOSING VIEWPOINTS®

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"Congress shall make no law . . .
abridging the freedom of speech,
or of the press."

First Amendment to the US Constitution

The basic foundation of our democracy is the first amendment guarantee of freedom of expression. The *Opposing Viewpoints Series* is dedicated to the concept of this basic freedom and the idea that it is more important to practice it than to enshrine it.

Contents

	Page
Why Consider Opposing Viewpoints?	9
Introduction	13
 Chapter 1: What Causes Crime?	
Chapter Preface	16
1. Poverty Causes Crime	17
<i>Elliott Currie</i>	
2. Poverty Does Not Cause Crime	25
<i>James K. Stewart</i>	
3. American Values Cause Crime	33
<i>Kevin N. Wright</i>	
4. Biological Factors Cause Crime	40
<i>James Q. Wilson & Richard J. Herrnstein</i>	
5. Lack of Moral Character Causes Crime	48
<i>Donald D. Schroeder</i>	
6. Thrill-Seeking Causes Crime	54
<i>Jack Katz</i>	
A Critical Thinking Activity: Recognizing Stereotypes	59
Periodical Bibliography	61
 Chapter 2: How Should Criminals Be Treated?	
Chapter Preface	63
1. Criminals Should Be Sentenced to Prison	64
<i>Robert Johnson & Jackson Tory</i>	
2. Criminals Should Be Given Alternatives to Prison	70
<i>Joan Petersilia</i>	
3. Criminals Should Make Restitution for Their Crimes	75
<i>Charles Colson</i>	
4. Career Criminals Should Be Incarcerated	79
<i>Eugene H. Methvin</i>	
5. Imprisoning Career Criminals Will Not Work	84
<i>David R. Struckhoff</i>	
6. Criminals Should Be Given Prison Furloughs	89
<i>Robert Taliaferro</i>	

7. Prison Furloughs Allow Criminals To Commit More Crimes	93
<i>Robert James Bidinotto</i>	
A Critical Thinking Activity: Evaluating Concerns in Sentencing Criminals	98
Periodical Bibliography	100
Chapter 3: How Can Crime Be Reduced?	
Chapter Preface	102
1. Imprisoning More Criminals Will Reduce Crime	103
<i>Ernest van den Haag</i>	
2. Imprisoning More Criminals Will Not Reduce Crime	111
<i>Don C. Gibbons</i>	
3. Legalizing Drugs Can Reduce Crime	119
<i>Ethan A. Nadelmann</i>	
4. Legalizing Drugs Cannot Reduce Crime	125
<i>Robert E. Peterson</i>	
5. Youth Employment Programs Can Reduce Crime	130
<i>William H. Kohlberg</i>	
6. Citizen Action Can Reduce Crime	135
<i>William Wilbanks</i>	
7. Community-Based Organizations Can Reduce Crime	142
<i>Elizabeth Lyttleton Sturz & Mary Taylor</i>	
8. Environmental Design Can Reduce Crime	147
<i>Edward Krupat & Philip E. Kubzansky</i>	
A Critical Thinking Activity: Recognizing Statements That Are Provable	154
Periodical Bibliography	156
Chapter 4: How Should White-Collar Crime Be Controlled?	
Chapter Preface	158
1. White-Collar Crime Is Serious	159
<i>Russell Mokhiber</i>	
2. White-Collar Crime Is Not Serious	164
<i>Morgan O. Reynolds</i>	
3. Executives Should Be Punished for White-Collar Crime	169
<i>Ernest Conine</i>	

4. Companies Should Be Punished for White-Collar Crime	173
<i>Daniel Farber</i>	
5. White-Collar Criminals Should Be Imprisoned	177
<i>Eric Lewis</i>	
6. White-Collar Criminals Should Be Sentenced to House Arrest	182
<i>Jack B. Weinstein & Probation Department of the United States District Court, Eastern District of New York</i>	
A Critical Thinking Activity: Understanding Words in Context	187
Periodical Bibliography	189
Chapter 5: Would Gun Control Reduce Crime?	
Chapter Preface	191
1. Gun Control Would Reduce Crime	192
<i>Irvin Block</i>	
2. Gun Control Would Not Reduce Crime	200
<i>James D. Wright</i>	
3. Guns Are Necessary for Self-Defense	209
<i>David B. Kopel</i>	
4. Guns Should Not Be Used for Self-Defense	213
<i>Franklin E. Zimring & Gordon Hawkins</i>	
5. Gun Control Violates the Constitution	218
<i>National Rifle Association</i>	
6. Gun Control Does Not Violate the Constitution	224
<i>Michael K. Beard & Kristin M. Rand</i>	
A Critical Thinking Activity: Distinguishing Between Fact and Opinion	229
Periodical Bibliography	231
Organizations To Contact	232
Bibliography of Books	235
Index	237

Why Consider Opposing Viewpoints?

"It is better to debate a question without settling it than to settle a question without debating it."

Joseph Joubert (1754-1824)

The Importance of Examining Opposing Viewpoints

The purpose of the Opposing Viewpoints Series, and this book in particular, is to present balanced, and often difficult to find, opposing points of view on complex and sensitive issues.

Probably the best way to become informed is to analyze the positions of those who are regarded as experts and well studied on issues. It is important to consider every variety of opinion in an attempt to determine the truth. Opinions from the mainstream of society should be examined. But also important are opinions that are considered radical, reactionary, or minority as well as those stigmatized by some other uncomplimentary label. An important lesson of history is the eventual acceptance of many unpopular and even despised opinions. The ideas of Socrates, Jesus, and Galileo are good examples of this.

Readers will approach this book with their own opinions on the issues debated within it. However, to have a good grasp of one's own viewpoint, it is necessary to understand the arguments of those with whom one disagrees. It can be said that those who do not completely understand their adversary's point of view do not fully understand their own.

A persuasive case for considering opposing viewpoints has been presented by John Stuart Mill in his work *On Liberty*. When examining controversial issues it may be helpful to reflect on this suggestion:

The only way in which a human being can make some approach to knowing the whole of a subject, is by hearing what can be said about it by persons of every variety of opinion, and studying all modes in which it can be looked at by every character of mind. No wise man ever acquired his wisdom in any mode but this.

Analyzing Sources of Information

The Opposing Viewpoints Series includes diverse materials taken from magazines, journals, books, and newspapers, as well as statements and position papers from a wide range of individuals, organizations and governments. This broad spectrum of sources helps to develop patterns of thinking which are open to the consideration of a variety of opinions.

Pitfalls To Avoid

A pitfall to avoid in considering opposing points of view is that of regarding one's own opinion as being common sense and the most rational stance and the point of view of others as being only opinion and naturally wrong. It may be that another's opinion is correct and one's own is in error.

Another pitfall to avoid is that of closing one's mind to the opinions of those with whom one disagrees. The best way to approach a dialogue is to make one's primary purpose that of understanding the mind and arguments of the other person and not that of enlightening him or her with one's own solutions. More can be learned by listening than speaking.

It is my hope that after reading this book the reader will have a deeper understanding of the issues debated and will appreciate the complexity of even seemingly simple issues on which good and honest people disagree. This awareness is particularly important in a democratic society such as ours where people enter into public debate to determine the common good. Those with whom one disagrees should not necessarily be regarded as enemies, but perhaps simply as people who suggest different paths to a common goal.

Developing Basic Reading and Thinking Skills

In this book, carefully edited opposing viewpoints are purposely placed back to back to create a running debate; each viewpoint is preceded by a short quotation that best expresses the author's main argument. This format instantly plunges the reader into the midst of a controversial issue and greatly aids that reader in mastering the basic skill of recognizing an author's point of view.

A number of basic skills for critical thinking are practiced in the activities that appear throughout the books in the series. Some of

the skills are:

Evaluating Sources of Information The ability to choose from among alternative sources the most reliable and accurate source in relation to a given subject.

Separating Fact from Opinion The ability to make the basic distinction between factual statements (those that can be demonstrated or verified empirically) and statements of opinion (those that are beliefs or attitudes that cannot be proved).

Identifying Stereotypes The ability to identify oversimplified, exaggerated descriptions (favorable or unfavorable) about people and insulting statements about racial, religious or national groups, based upon misinformation or lack of information.

Recognizing Ethnocentrism The ability to recognize attitudes or opinions that express the view that one's own race, culture, or group is inherently superior, or those attitudes that judge another culture or group in terms of one's own.

It is important to consider opposing viewpoints and equally important to be able to critically analyze those viewpoints. The activities in this book are designed to help the reader master these thinking skills. Statements are taken from the book's viewpoints and the reader is asked to analyze them. This technique aids the reader in developing skills that not only can be applied to the viewpoints in this book, but also to situations where opinionated spokespersons comment on controversial issues. Although the activities are helpful to the solitary reader, they are most useful when the reader can benefit from the interaction of group discussion.

Using this book and others in the series should help readers develop basic reading and thinking skills. These skills should improve the reader's ability to understand what they read. Readers should be better able to separate fact from opinion, substance from rhetoric and become better consumers of information in our media-centered culture.

This volume of the Opposing Viewpoints Series does not advocate a particular point of view. Quite the contrary! The very nature of the book leaves it to the reader to formulate the opinions he or she finds most suitable. My purpose as publisher is to see that this is made possible by offering a wide range of viewpoints which are fairly presented.

David L. Bender
Publisher

Introduction

"The streets are safe in Philadelphia, it's only the people who make them unsafe."

Frank Rizzo

In many respects, the United States is a country obsessed with crime. Newspaper articles detailing criminal incidents appear every day, and television news programs frequently begin with the latest crime story. Television police series remain popular, as do shows which reenact actual crimes in lurid detail and invite viewers with information on the suspect to call the police. Hollywood motion pictures often feature criminals and frequently romanticize them.

The prevalence of crime in the media raises the question of how much the media's portrayal of crime is based on reality. How does crime affect Americans in daily life? Kevin N. Wright, a crime researcher, argues that while the number of crimes committed in the US is high (averaging 35 million incidents a year), the probability of being victimized by a violent crime is smaller than many people think. He writes that the odds of an individual being murdered each year are about one in ten thousand, and that the chance of being injured by a criminal is less than being injured in accidents around the home. Wright concludes, "The American news media and the criminal justice establishment exploit the public by sensationalizing crime."

Yet crime affects people in serious ways even when they are not direct victims. Consumers pay higher prices in stores because of shoplifting. Burglary and auto theft result in higher security and insurance costs. The total costs of embezzlement, fraud, and other white-collar crimes run in the billions of dollars. Taxpayers pay additional billions of dollars to house criminals in prisons.

Another more insidious cost of crime is fear. Fear is a feature of many high-crime neighborhoods, where residents live in terror of muggers, drug traffickers, and gangs. Yet crime and the fear of crime are not confined to these communities. If you routinely lock the doors of your car or residence, if you plan your schedule to avoid certain places at certain times, or if you refrain from walking outside at night, you have been touched by America's crime problem. David C. Anderson, a crime reporter and editor

for *The New York Times*, described crime in middle-class neighborhoods as "an annoying preoccupation that never went away. . . . And if one thought about it long enough, the preoccupation turned to outrage."

Crime & Criminals: Opposing Viewpoints, replaces the 1984 edition with all new viewpoints. It presents viewpoints from criminologists, social workers, former prisoners, and psychologists. Topics debated are What Causes Crime? How Should Criminals Be Treated? How Can Crime Be Reduced? How Can White-Collar Crime Be Controlled? and Would Gun Control Reduce Crime? As the viewpoints in this book reveal, many important questions concerning the problem of crime remain unresolved.

1 CHAPTER

What Causes Crime?

CRIME AND
CRIMINALS

Chapter Preface

Why do some people commit crimes while others abide by society's laws? People have answered this question from many different perspectives.

One perspective on criminality is that biological traits are responsible. This idea has its scientific roots in the work of nineteenth-century criminologist Cesare Lombroso. Lombroso believed that criminals could be recognized by certain physical features such as crooked noses and handle-shaped ears. Although his theories about recognizing criminals by their appearance have been discredited, research continues today as scientists attempt to determine if genetic tendencies are involved in criminal behavior. In one study, psychologist Sarnoff Mednick surveyed children of criminals who were adopted and raised by noncriminal parents, and found that they were more likely to become criminals than other children.

Others argue that the causes of crime are environmental. Childhood experiences of family abuse and poverty are two reasons often used to explain why people become criminals. Those who believe crime results from environmental factors often advocate job programs, housing programs, and redistributing wealth as ways to stop crime.

The viewpoints in this chapter examine several ideas on the causes of crime.