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Juvenile Delinquency and the Transition to Monopoly Capitalism

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This paper identifies three macrosociological forces (i.e., the social position of youth, private market relations, and poverty and inequality) that are crucial for understanding delinquency and analyzes how these forces evolved together as part of the historical transformation in the United States to monopoly capitalism. The thesis is that these forces have contributed to delinquency by acting collectively to decrease the capacity of social institutions to maintain informal social control. Implications for policy are also considered.

Research has demonstrated that, during the course of childhood and adolescent socialization, the more meaningfully integrated persons became to those social institutions which promote informal social control, such as the family, school, and work, the lower the likelihood of delinquency. Concomitantly, the more integrated youths become to a delinquent peer group, the greater the chances of delinquency (Agnew, 1985; Caplan & LeBlanc, 1985; Elliott, Huizinga, & Ageton, 1985; Gardner & Shoemaker, 1989; Hindelang, 1973; Hirschi, 1969; Wiatrowski, Griswold, & Roberts, 1981).

Social institutions can be conceptualized as mediators between the macro level political economy and micro level individual behavior. Through their impact on social institutions, the macro forces emanating from a society's political economic organization shape the quantity and quality of behavioral choices available to individuals (Groves & Frank, 1986). By diminishing the capacity of institutions, especially the family, to positively influence the choices made by youths and by rendering youths vulnerable to delinquent socialization in peer groups, macro forces can weaken informal mechanisms of social control.

Theorists seeking to situate delinquency in the political economic context of the United States (e.g., Colvin & Pauly, 1983; Greenberg, 1977; Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1985) have generally focused on one of three macro forces, including either: (1) the socially defined position of youth, (2) the impact of market relations, or (3) poverty and inequality within the network of social class relations. However, studying one force without reference to the others can lead to an incomplete and fragmented analysis. A purpose of this paper is to show that the forces are closely connected in two ways. First, all three forces evolved together as part of the transformation of the political economy from *laissez-faire* to monopoly or late capitalism. Second, the forces have acted collectively to weaken informal mechanisms of social control. In establishing this second connection, the paper accomplishes another purpose, namely to move the political economic analysis of delinquency toward a micro level grounding. Such analyses usually lack a micro grounding (see Lynch & Groves, 1989; Melossi, 1985), which can make it difficult to appreciate the direct relevance to delinquent behavior. The paper also illustrates implications for policy.

The Socially Defined Position of Youth

The social position that youths now occupy was, in large part, molded by reforms arising from the child saving movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The reforms consist of the enactment of compulsory education legislation, the passage of child labor laws, and the creation of the juvenile justice system (Bortner, 1988; Platt, 1977; Starr, 1986).

The child saving movement was not an economically determined, tightly coordinated orchestration by elites having monolithic interests and purely selfish intentions. Though the reforms arising from the movement were inspired by the move to monopoly capitalism and accommodated the changing political economic order, the conscious intents of reformers must be carefully distinguished from the effects of reforms. Many reformers possessed a genuine desire to improve the plight of youths, particularly youths of immigrant stock living in underprivileged urban areas (Platt, 1977). In addition, as Kett (1977) observes, support for reforms came from political coalitions

with divergent and sometimes conflicting interests (e.g., philanthropists, educators, criminal justice officials, business leaders, and organized labor). Contrary to substantiating allegations of economic determinism and instrumental elitism, then, the historical evidence indicates that connections between economic transformation and the child saving reforms were mediated by the varied interests and political actions of reform supporters (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Rothman, 1980). Nevertheless, the groups who supported various facets of the child saving movement were drawn from middle and upper class circles and shared a fundamental allegiance to economic transformation in that they sought to adjust youths to fit the new order, not the reverse (Nasaw, 1979; Platt, 1977; Sheldon & Osborne, 1989).

With the accumulation and concentration of capital in the decades after the Civil War, the former system of economic production which had been dominated by agriculture and small-scale entrepreneurs (often family businesses) competing over shares of markets, gradually expanded into a system characterized by monopolistic corporations, urban factory production, a more abundant surplus of commodities, and heightened state regulation (Baran & Sweezy, 1966; Braverman, 1974; Edwards, 1979). The child saving reforms, geared as they were toward altering the way youths were socialized, can be understood against this backdrop of economic transition. Each reform extended formal state control over youths to help redefine the role of youths vis-a'-vis the changing political economic order (Bernard, 1992). State control was warranted to contain the class unrest surrounding economic transition and to redirect people into the emerging order. Youths were a favorable target of control because they represented the future generation of labor power. In effect, the responsibility of traditional institutions for socializing young people was buttressed and, to an extent, replaced with state control (Platt, 1977).

There are at least two reasons why altered socialization of youths was central to economic transformation. First, the greater potential for consumption sparked by the growth of commodity surplus created the need for youths to develop disciplined consumption patterns and tailor any extravagant aspirations for economic success they might have around realistic life opportunities (i.e., to accept their standings and responsibilities in the

class hierarchy). Second, youths had to be socialized to embrace the workplace character traits demanded by the shift to factory production (Nasaw, 1979). This shift was rendering obsolete the mechanisms of direct control traditionally exercised by employers over employees (Edwards, 1979). Technical control, which relied on machines to guide the labor process, and bureaucratic control, which altered the social relations of the workplace by instituting an impersonal system of role coordination and hierarchical authority, were increasingly substituted for control imposed directly by employers. The traditional apprenticeship system was ill-prepared to socialize youths in a fashion that would maximize the efficiency of these newly instituted workplace controls. This type of socialization required the internalization of norms and values consistent with mass production, the discipline to submit to hierarchy and function as a team player in a corporate bureaucracy.

Compulsory Education and Child Labor Laws

As economic transformation and technological innovation proceeded, making apprenticeship increasingly obsolete and reducing the strong demand for child labor that had characterized earlier stages of industrialization (Kett, 1977), a need emerged to impart on youths the specialized job skills, training certifications, and ethos required to participate in monopoly capitalism. Gradually, from 1850 on, child labor was restricted and school attendance made mandatory by legislation. Such legislation appealed to a variety of moral and economic interests (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Humphries & Greenberg, 1981; Kett, 1977; Platt, 1977). Child labor laws promised to ameliorate the lot of children in factories, and education, by promising upward mobility, seemed a viable way to achieve social equality. Likewise, in view of the mass urbanization and immigration coinciding with industrialization, education represented a way to obtain greater cultural uniformity and a way to systematically and efficiently guide the moral development of children. Compulsory education and child labor restrictions also meant that youths could not fully enter the labor market until a specified age was reached. To organized labor, the implications were that competition for jobs would decrease and that wage levels would

be less threatened by inexpensive child labor. The implication to businesses that did not rely heavily on child labor for profit was that competitors who were still doing so would either have to raise outlays for labor or be driven from the market. To business and political leaders alike, the preservation of adult jobs was an attractive way to contain the working class unrest associated with wide-scale unemployment.

However, the effects of the transfer of youths from the labor market to the schools exceeded these appeals and also went beyond the obvious need to supply the technical training required by shifts in production. As Bowles and Gintis (1976, p. 186) demonstrate, "schooling was . . . a means of producing the new forms of motivation and discipline required in the emerging corporate order." The structural correspondence between the social relations of the educational experience and the social relations of the workplace under late capitalism eased the movement of youths into the labor force and increased their productive capacity. Schooling reproduced a social consciousness, a personality, and a set of interpersonal behavior patterns that were congruent with labor force participation. The structure of the educational experience replicated the hierarchical division of labor as well as the bureaucratic relationships of authority and control typical of the workplace; this is clearly exemplified by competition over grades and such practices as tracking and the establishment of separate curriculums.

The Juvenile Justice System

The first juvenile correctional institutions opened in the first half of the nineteenth century, and efforts to formally control youthful deviance became more systematized at the turn of that century with the creation of the juvenile court. The court and its corollary agencies spread rapidly across the country with little opposition (Rothman, 1980; Sutton, 1985). The system was praised as a humane improvement over the earlier practice of processing juvenile offenders with adult offenders; it also afforded juvenile justice workers considerable discretion and power and was congruent with the desire of business leaders for orderly urban communities in which to foster commerce (Shelden & Osborne, 1989).

The court's *parens patriae* ideology, emphasizing the paternalistic role of the state and the need to tailor intervention around the welfare of the individual child, justified enormous governmental discretion over the lives of youths and made due process appear to be an unnecessary obstruction. This ideology was deemed especially appropriate for immigrant children, since their families could hardly be counted upon to assimilate them to American culture (Nasaw, 1979; Rothman, 1980). More generally, the existence of the court ensured that whenever traditional social institutions failed to control youthful deviance informally, a formal substitute was available to inculcate moral values, industriousness, and obedience to authority (Liazos, 1974).

The codification of a new category of behaviors known as "status offenses" and the authority accorded the court to regulate these behaviors expanded and diversified state power over youths. Control was extended beyond criminal activities to cover age-specific conduct heretofore unregulated by the state, such as incorrigibility. The court's mandate to control status offenses, coupled with research demonstrating the preoccupation of many early courts with status and minor property offenses (Kett, 1977; Nasaw, 1979; Shelden & Osborne, 1989), underscore the court's role in regulating the petty infractions and moral transgressions surrounding increased availability of commodities.

Withering of Informal Social Control

A net effect of the child saving reforms was to prolong the interval between childhood and adulthood by precluding youths from meaningful participation in "adult" activities. The status of adolescence, popularized in 1905 by G. Stanley Hall, evolved into a limbo, a precarious marginal position between childhood and adulthood (Bynum & Thompson, 1989). The consequences for the informal control of youth crime were significant.

The system of age stratification which ensued from laws requiring education and restricting child labor meant that prior, clearly defined roles in the spheres of work and family were replaced with more ambiguous roles in the school and peer

group, leaving youths without a sense of immediate purpose and direction. Youths became segregated from adult life, and the school and peer group became their predominant sources of reference and identity. The capacity of such adult dominated institutions as the family and work to exert informal social control over youthful behavior began to diminish, whereas the socializing force of the peer group increased (Friday & Hage, 1976; Greenberg, 1977). At the same time, the juvenile court began supplementing the control functions of traditional institutions and, to the extent that greater reliance was placed on the state to regulate youthful deviance, the control functions of those institutions were displaced.

Research (Allan & Steffensmeier, 1989; Duster, 1987) demonstrating a strong association between crime and both unemployment and underemployment among youths confirms that the restriction of youths from meaningful labor market participation is important for understanding delinquency. When the bulk of youthful activities shifted to the school and peer group, youths grew reliant on education and peer interaction for the esteem, status, and sense of social contribution formerly gained through work. A youth subculture evolved which placed a premium on its members having discretionary money (Bute, 1981; Christie, 1978; Friday & Hage, 1976; Greenberg, 1977; Lowe, Krahn, & Tanner, 1988; Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1978), but labor market restrictions left youths largely dependent on their parents for financial support. Paradoxically, the school and peer group provided youths a certain social autonomy from the family, but youths were left dependent on their parents for discretionary funds.

Youths from all class levels are affected by labor market restrictions but, ultimately, the effects have proven strongest among youths from the lower classes because of the common inability of their parents to provide financial support. Reminiscent of Merton's (1938) argument, illicit activities such as theft and drug dealing have come to be perceived as viable alternatives for attaining material possessions in a society where status is so often gauged by these possessions. Furthermore, working class youth are sometimes unable to gain fulfillment from the school experience, since education is dominated by

middle class standards and segmented along competitive lines of talent and ability that parallel those of the modern labor market (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1978). As Starr (1986, p. 326) indicates, the school represents a "certifying agency" for the labor market. Youths who are not well prepared to conform to the demands of the school often find the experience alienating and degrading. It is therefore unsurprising that, in the absence of meaningful labor market participation, like-situated peers and illicit behaviors often assume more relevance than the school for providing status and esteem (Cohen, 1955).

Market Relations

In the United States, the social position of youth is situated within the framework of normative principles that regulate private market relations. There is a definite tendency for norms that govern the production and distribution of commodities in the private marketplace to extend into all spheres of life (e.g., family and school). To the degree that market relations permeate society in this fashion, interpersonal cooperation and collective social welfare can become subordinate considerations to competition and personal gain. A sense of normative disregard for the well being of others is prompted and, consequently, informal means of controlling crime lose force (Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1985). In addition to reshaping the social position of young people, the transition to monopoly capitalism elevated the pervasiveness of private market relations to historically unrivaled levels, creating what Braverman (1974, p. 271) terms a "universal market" wherein the totality of the individual was subsumed by market principles.

Expansions in production that accompanied economic transition greatly increased the surplus of commodities which, in turn, created a potential for more liberal patterns of consumption. Moreover, with the emergence of corporate monopolies, oligopolies, and conglomerates and the decline of small entrepreneurs, the primary locus of business competition shifted from product quality and pricing to marketing and advertising. Advertising, or what Baran and Sweezy (1966, p. 114) call "the

sales effort," redefined standards of material possession and human consumption and, in so doing, played a vital role in creating new modes of surplus utilization. Consequently, across social institutions, interpersonal relations grew increasingly oriented to individualistic commodity consumption.

The ascendance of market relations and the altered social position of youth were mutually reinforcing phenomena. The greater potential and pressure to consume coinciding with economic transformation necessitated greater state regulations to supplement the responsibility of traditional institutions for ensuring disciplined consumption patterns among youths. Such discipline was a prerequisite for a dependable future supply of labor. Furthermore, the altered social position of youths afforded increased leisure (consumption) time by relieving them of traditional roles and restricting most of their activities to the school and peer group. With the school and peer group being arenas ideally suited to promote social comparison and competition for materialistic status, it is unsurprising that youths have become a highly profitable advertising market.

Similar to the adolescent status, market relations are germane to youth crime because, in shaping interaction and socialization in social institutions, these relations detract from the ability of institutions to maintain informal control. Especially relevant is the manner in which the wider structure of market relations can affect social interaction in the family and peer group.

When interaction between youths and parents becomes more oriented toward objectives of self-gain and commodity consumption than toward intimacy and collective family welfare, the family's ability to exert informal control diminishes. Yet, the social position of youth provides an incentive for parent-youth relations to be geared toward commodities. Youths were excluded from meaningful roles in the labor market during the same era that the adolescent market became a profitable one for business to target. As a result, the pressure to consume, which was being fueled by the peer group, increased, but the power to do so independently of parental support diminished. As youths grew more dependent on their parents for economic support, materialistic considerations began to affect family interaction. It is not that modern family relations are completely devoid

of intimacy but, rather, that the intimate relations suited to enhancing informal control are often contested by the force of market relations.

Another effect of market relations pertains to parenting practices and later extends to experiences in school and the peer group. As Colvin and Pauly (1983) propose, the various workplace control mechanisms used to compel adults to comply with the demands of their employment (e.g., threat of dismissal and layoff, wage levels, technical quotas, advancement opportunities, and manipulation of status) are reproduced in family life; the kinds of controls to which adults are exposed as workers affect the controls they employ as parents (see Kohn, 1969). Persons such as assembly-line workers who are often subjected to harsh, coercive, and externally imposed controls at work (e.g., threat of layoff and piece rates) are likely to practice the same coercive form of control as parents. By contrast, persons such as teachers who are subjected to less external coercion and instead are expected to exercise internal control as workers are likely to orient their children toward internal, noncoercive self-control. The greater the coerciveness of family control practices, the more alienating and negative the parent-child relationship (Colvin & Pauly, 1983).

The quality of family relationships formed during the early years of socialization affects school relationships. Children who develop alienated relations with their parents due to overly coercive parental control practices are likely to be defined as requiring coercive control in the school. In Colvin and Pauly's (1983, p. 537) words, "a child with negative initial bonds is likely to be placed in a control structure at school that parallels the coercive family control structure that produced the child's negative bond." As coercive relations develop between children and school authorities, children are likely to become alienated from school, leaving them poorly integrated to the school as well as the family.

When children approach adolescence, the quality of prior relationships in the family and school helps guide their choices for peer group associations. Youths who are poorly integrated to society's institutions tend to associate with peer groups that display similarly weak integration (Colvin & Pauly, 1983). Given

sustained interaction in a group characterized by a deficit of mainstream norms and definitions, combined with an excess of delinquent norms and definitions, the likelihood of delinquent behavior increases (Matsueda, 1982; Sutherland & Cressey, 1978).

Implicating market relations as a source of delinquent norms and definitions in peer groups, Schwendinger and Schwendinger (1985) contend that the wider structure of market relations encroaches on peer groups and erodes the moral, controlling element of the standards youths adopt in their interpersonal interactions. Adolescent groups tend to become stratified in relation to one another by identifying and distinguishing themselves on the basis of material possessions and commodity consumption. Competition over status is fostered between and within groups.

Poverty and Inequality

Both the social position of youth and market relations are encompassed by the system of class stratification in which groups are positioned hierarchically in relation to ownership and control of economic production. Class stratification generates unemployment and underemployment which, coupled with a lack of egalitarian tax and welfare measures, are major contributors to poverty and extreme inequality in the United States (Currie, 1985; Page, 1983).

Historically, any class stratified society that has produced goods and services far in excess of those required for subsistence has yielded a surplus of labor. The surplus of labor represents a resource to be drawn upon during periods of economic growth and flourishing demands for labor, and by encouraging competition over jobs, surplus labor helps maintain an upper cap on wage levels (Greenberg, 1981). With the transition to monopoly capitalism, however, increasing portions of the surplus labor pool became expendable, ultimately resulting in what has been described as an underclass of permanently unemployed and underemployed persons (Kramer, 1984; Reiman & Headlee, 1981; Spitzer, 1975; Wilson, 1987). Disproportionately young and black, these persons are overrepresented in street

crime statistics (Allan & Steffensmeier, 1989; Duster, 1987; Hindelang, 1978, 1981).

Analyzing the growth of surplus labor in the context of the shift to monopoly capitalism, Spitzer (1975) observes that, as industrialization progressed, profit objectives led businesses to mechanize thus displacing industrial workers with more efficient forms of technology. Technological displacement maximized profit by enhancing production quantity and by reducing the long-term outlays for labor. Mechanization also saturated markets with surplus products. Due to the need to dispose of surplus and due to the knowledge and information requirements brought on by technological advances, demands for industrial labor became outstripped by demands for various positions in the service sector economy, where higher quality jobs came to necessitate better educational credentials. Competition for the dwindling number of skilled and semi-skilled industrial positions increased, while persons with few skills and less education were left to compete over an inadequate number of low quality jobs in the industrial and particularly in the service economies. Though these low quality jobs, sometimes referred to as secondary labor market positions, usually have one or two salutary features, seldom are many such features (e.g., adequate pay and benefits, advancement opportunities, job security, etc.) combined in a single job (see Edwards, 1979; Friedman & Friedman, 1986); hence the rise of the contemporary working poor.

Other factors operated to fuel unemployment and underemployment. As capital accumulated and became concentrated in fewer hands, the economy grew more monopolized and created a barrier to entry for entrepreneurs. Given the scale of transaction required to successfully compete with big business for markets under monopoly capitalism, would-be entrepreneurs became more dependent on large corporations for employment, thus intensifying competition over higher quality industrial and service jobs. Later, beginning in the 1960s, the development of international economic competition resulted in a transfer of goods-producing jobs overseas and, in so doing, contributed to the movement of capital away from industry. Such competition also promoted an overall lowering of domestic industrial wages

to maintain profit levels. Within industry, masses of capital were transferred from union to non-union areas of the nation (cf. Duster, 1987).

The developments just discussed have meant economic hardship for millions of American youths. Young people are among the fastest growing poverty groups in the United States, with one-fifth of the nation's population aged 16–19 and roughly half of the teenagers in single parent households living at the poverty level (Gelman, 1990; Sum, Harrington, & Goedicke, 1987). Despite the recent creation of federal employment and training programs for youths, the gap between youth and adult unemployment has continued to widen (Lerman, 1986). Indicative of the marginalized status of adolescence, Starr (1986) estimates that teenagers represent approximately one-tenth of the total United States labor force but approximately a quarter of the unemployed; and people under age 25 constitute about a quarter of the labor force but about half of the unemployed. Youthful unemployment is concentrated among minority youths and those from economically disadvantaged families, such that in the mid 1980s approximately one-third of all teenagers from poor families were unemployed, and unemployment rates for black teens continued to range from 40 to 50 percent (Duster, 1987; Gelman, 1990; Sum et al., 1987). New jobs were created in the 1980s but, as Sum et al. point out, a disproportionately low number of the jobs were received by youths, and most jobs obtained by youths during this period were poor quality service positions (Miller, 1990). All told, the economy has simply failed to generate enough good jobs to have any noteworthy effect on poverty and inequality. Redistribution has not been forthcoming, given the reluctance of the state to undertake egalitarian tax and welfare reform.

Poverty, Inequality, and Delinquency

Much debate has transpired about the association between economic disadvantage and delinquency (e.g., Braithwaite, 1981; Clelland & Carter, 1980; Thornberry & Farnsworth, 1982; Tittle, Villemez, & Smith, 1978). Recently, some researchers have advanced the notion that, while poverty and inequality are not direct causes of youth crime, they interact with other processes

to affect delinquency indirectly (Blau & Blau, 1982; Currie, 1985; Larzelere & Patterson, 1990; Michalowski, 1985; Tittle & Meier, 1990), a notion consistent with the view being proposed here. Poverty and inequality are related to delinquency through the disintegrative effects they have on social institutions. The harsh life conditions associated with impoverishment and the animosities arising from gross inequalities in a wealthy consumptive society, where mere wants are prompted than fulfilled, can upset the web of cooperative social relations that maintain informal control (Kramer, 1984).

Illustrative of this point is research suggesting that the effects of poverty and inequality are mediated by parenting practices. Compared to the parenting practices characteristic of families at the middle and upper echelons of the class structure, the practices exercised in disadvantaged families are often less suited for delinquency prevention. Generally, lower class parents do not tend to monitor their childrens' activities as closely, tend to be less consistent in rewarding and punishing their children, and tend to communicate less effectively with them (Larzelere & Patterson, 1990).

The reasons for these differences in parenting can be discerned by examining the interrelated phenomena of family stress and lack of parenting resources. Lower class parents are often less able to consistently afford material rewards to induce desired behaviors from their children. Further, as Currie (1985) remarks, many disadvantaged families are excessively large relative to their incomes. With the competitive structure of market relations impinging on family interaction, these families face internal tensions and conflicts over scarce resources. In addition, the tremendous stress accompanying financial insecurity and hardship can exacerbate conflict to dysfunctional levels. Such stress frequently creates staunch barriers to effective communication and conflict resolution. When parents hold employment, economic pressures often require them to spend considerable time at work away from their children if subsistence is to be maintained; this is particularly the case in the skyrocketing number of single parent homes headed predominately by women. In the absence of parental monitoring

and affordable day care resources, a delinquent peer group may be left to affect socialization (Steinberg, 1986).

The absence of working parents poses special adjustment problems for adolescents. Parental absence can necessitate that teens assume adult responsibilities (e.g., caring for younger siblings, doing errands, and even furnishing supplemental income) in a society where they are not accorded full adult status. The social position of youth lags behind the earlier pace of adolescent emancipation in these families, and it is reasonable to expect that youthful inability or reluctance to fill adult roles will be a source of family stress and conflict. These factors are antithetical to the kind of family socialization that prevents delinquency.

Implications

The foregoing theoretical analysis has shown that three interwoven macro forces (i.e., the social position of youth, market relations, and poverty and inequality) evolved with monopoly capitalism and contributed to delinquency by jointly undermining informal mechanisms of social control. While it is not the purpose of this paper to present a comprehensive policy proposal for delinquency reduction, it is appropriate to illustrate some of the policy implications of the previous analysis. No claim is made that these policy considerations are novel or exhaustive of theoretical implications. Furthermore, the theoretical analysis implies that there are historically ingrained political and economic barriers to resolving the delinquency problem within the existing structure of monopoly capitalism. Though discourse is certainly needed about how alternative political economic structures might help reduce delinquency, there is also need for discourse about shorter term initiatives that can be taken within the existing structure (cf. Kramer, 1984; Michalowski, 1983). The discussion below concentrates on the latter area.

The theoretical position developed earlier implies that: (a) delinquency can be substantially reduced by increasing the capacity of social institutions to maintain informal social control, and (b) a promising way to strengthen informal controls is to

target the three macro forces which have historically weakened them. Without affording youths a social position which enables them to derive status from full and meaningful participation in society and without policies to mitigate or cushion the deleterious impact of market relations, poverty, and inequality on social institutions, rates of youth crime are likely to remain alarmingly high.

Social Position of Youth

Youths would be in a position to participate more fully and meaningfully in society if they were granted more responsible and rewarding roles. First, as Bynum and Thompson (1989, pp. 473–476) point out, youths should be given greater opportunities for participation in political decision-making processes that affect them. For example, young people and their parents could routinely be permitted to represent their interests on school boards and other policy bodies at various levels of government where matters pertaining directly to their welfare are at issue. Second, restrictive child labor laws should be revised so youths who choose to hold jobs (rather than or in addition to attending school) are allowed to perform meaningful work at competitive wages and benefits. The purpose of laws regulating youthful labor should be to protect youths from physical danger and exploitation rather than to curtail adult unemployment and coerce youths into school attendance. Third, it is questionable whether compulsory education laws achieve much of value among teens who have continually found the school experience alienating and degrading rather than fulfilling. Instead of mandating that each person attend school until an arbitrary age is reached, it would seem better to encourage voluntary attendance by trying to ensure that all persons gain status and a sense of accomplishment from the school experience. For example, stratified tracking systems could be replaced with curriculum diversification and enrichment programs tailored to the heterogeneity of the population. This would help make the school less of an agency which replicates the hierarchical and bureaucratic nature of the labor market. The school should be an arena for cultivating a wide and variegated range of individual talents, thereby instilling the desires to learn and contribute to society

in addition to a well-rounded ability to creatively think about problems. Finally, juvenile justice practices should be altered. Serious consideration should be given to eliminating status offense codes because these codes hold youths accountable to a different standard of behavior than adults and help displace informal social control. Also, the vast discretion characteristic of juvenile justice permits inconsistency to flourish and, in the process, promotes perceptions of injustice and disrespect for the system among juveniles (Bynum & Thompson, 1989). There is no defensible reason for denying juveniles any of the legal protections to which adults are entitled, since doing so reinforces and legitimates age segregation.

Initiatives like these would help de-marginalize the social position of youth. The overriding goal is to integrate youths more fully into society and reduce the extent to which they are necessarily dependent on the peer group for socialization.

Market Relations

Along with changes in the social position of youth should come recognition of the pervasive and disintegrative influences of private market relations on social institutions and concerted efforts to mitigate those effects. In particular, steps can be taken to encourage a more cooperative structure of interpersonal relations in the family. For example, serious attention should be given to the observation that the workplace controls to which adults are subjected affect how they rear their children; businesses that rely heavily on external coercion and punitiveness should institute such measures as worker participation programs which give workers more control over their labor processes thus orienting them toward internal control. Further, in targeting the youth market, advertisers should become more sensitive both to the impact of equating status and personal worth with material possessions and to the negative effects which the constant pressure to consume can have on family interaction. Government regulations should promote greater ethics in this domain of advertising. Also, as Currie (1985, pp. 244–254) suggests, increased government and private support should be provided for various early intervention programs aimed at high risk families and youths, including Head

Start. These interventions should, above all, be geared toward building interpersonal trust and empathic communication in the family unit and developing parenting practices grounded in negotiation, compromise, and conflict resolution skills. The interventions not only ease the impact of market relations on families but also cushion the family stress and conflict arising out of poverty and inequality.

Poverty and Inequality

At the center of initiatives like those under discussion here must be a firm and long-term commitment from government to combat poverty and distribute economic resources more evenly across the population. A federally sponsored full employment policy, containing provisions for the creation of public jobs which are tied to the needs of local communities and which offer sufficient pay and benefits, would assist in expanding the supply of adequate employment (Currie, 1985; Michalowski, 1983). Efforts to upgrade low quality jobs (i.e., in terms of pay, benefits, and advancement potential) would complement a policy of full employment by shrinking the working poor population. Tax incentive and worker retraining policies meant to discourage the displacement of workers through technology and geographical relocation of jobs would also complement full employment (Michalowski, 1983). Likewise, expansions in job training programs for youths are required owing to the loss of manufacturing jobs and, thus, the lessened potential for youths to gain work experience; the gap between the qualifications possessed by many youths and the qualifications required to obtain entry level career positions must be lessened (Duster, 1987; Wilson, 1987). Expanded tax credits for day care and government subsidies for day care would help insure that more working parents have access to quality services. Truly egalitarian tax reform and more generous welfare assistance to people in severe economic need would further alleviate the stress and conflict faced by many families.

Conclusion

There is no shortage of viable policies that could be adopted to reduce delinquency. Yet, for approximately the last 15 years,

the United States has been advancing a "get tough" stance in an attempt to combat youth crime. This stance has resulted, for instance, in provisions that make it easier for prosecutors to transfer juvenile offenders to adult court, sentencing policies which have escalated rates of juvenile incarceration (especially for blacks), and the upholding of capital punishment for juveniles by the United States Supreme Court. These reactive get tough measures stand in sharp contrast to what is theoretically known about the macro sources of the delinquency problem. Unless policy becomes proactive and much more closely aligned with available theoretical knowledge, the United States will continue to make little if any progress in the area of delinquency control.

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