



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 24
Issue 4 December

Article 19

December 1997

Search and Destroy: African American Males in the Criminal Justice System. Jerome J. Miller

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Criminology Commons, and the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

(1997) "Search and Destroy: African American Males in the Criminal Justice System. Jerome J. Miller," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 24: Iss. 4, Article 19.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15453/0191-5096.2464>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol24/iss4/19>

This Book Note is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



that there is little more to be added to this extensive corpus of knowledge, Nolan and Wheelan show that much more needs to be done if studies of poverty are to be accurate and useful for policy purposes. They point out that no standardized measure of poverty has yet emerged. Nor is there any consensus about the definition of poverty. Although an extensive literature on the subject is now available, studies of the incidence and nature of poverty are notoriously imprecise and unreliable.

Unfortunately, the authors do not seek to correct this situation. They tend to agree, if somewhat reluctantly, with the prevailing view that it would be futile to attempt to develop a single, standardized definition and measure of poverty. Instead, they offer a more modest refinement of existing approaches based on theoretical concepts of deprivation which move the discussion in the direction of standardization. This approach is illustrated with reference to survey data in Ireland where both authors currently work. In addition, the book provides very useful updates on recent developments in the literature including commentaries on the 'underclass' debate and the writings of Amartya Sen. These are particularly good and will be helpful not only to poverty researchers but to students looking for comprehensive summaries of the field.

Jerome J. Miller. *Search and Destroy: African American Males in the Criminal Justice System*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. \$ 24.95 hardcover.

Despite having the largest prison population in the industrialized world, political leaders in the United States continue to campaign for tougher sentences, more incarceration and the adoption of ever more punitive approaches to the country's pressing social problems. The United States also leads the world in scientific criminological and penological research but paradoxically, the findings of this research are seldom used to inform policy. While criminologists have long demonstrated that the use of incarceration is an ineffective means of dealing with the majority of criminal offenses, their studies are ignored in the rush to persuade citizens that more and more people need to be imprisoned. As the costs of incarceration escalate, and as the futility of current criminal justice policy become increasingly apparent, the need to

heed the findings of criminological research is more urgent than ever before.

Jerome Miller's study shows how the nation's current obsession with drug suppression has not only failed to eradicate drug use but has created a highly expensive but ineffective system which targets young African American males and channels them into a futile process of arrest, incarceration and recidivism. Young black males encounter the system at a early age and on the basis of relatively minor offenses, begin a career that results in a very high proportion of incarceration among this population group. On release, few are able to find employment and are thus assured of recidivism. Not only are attempt to suppress drug use subverted but whole communities are decimated ensuring the perpetuation of poverty, neglect and crime.

This is a deeply disturbing book but it is also persuasive and readable and deserves to reach a wide audience. However, as the author himself recognizes, the entrenched racism which drives the criminal justice system pervades the wider society as well and, for this reason, its message will be resistant to change. While prospects for reform may be bleak, Miller's eloquent plea for reason, decency and compassion should be heeded.