

SOCIETY

social order they themselves had made.”

The writings of philosopher John Locke (1632–1704) and others had convinced them that society, “though no doubt ordained in principle by God, was man’s own creation—formed and sustained, and thus alterable, by human beings acting autonomously,” says Wood. Meanwhile, Enlightenment science fostered the belief that causes and effects in human affairs could be discovered, as they were in Newtonian physics. Faced with King George III’s declarations of good will and such shockingly hostile developments as the 1765 Stamp Act, colonial leaders assumed that British officials were conspiring against them.

Ironically, Woods observes, the Founders’ “paranoia” arose out of an optimistic faith in human reason and responsibility.

More Jails Won't Really Help

“Crime and Ideology” by Elliott Currie, in *Working Papers* (May-June and July-Aug., 1982), Trusteeship Institute, 186 Hampshire St., Cambridge, Mass. 02139.

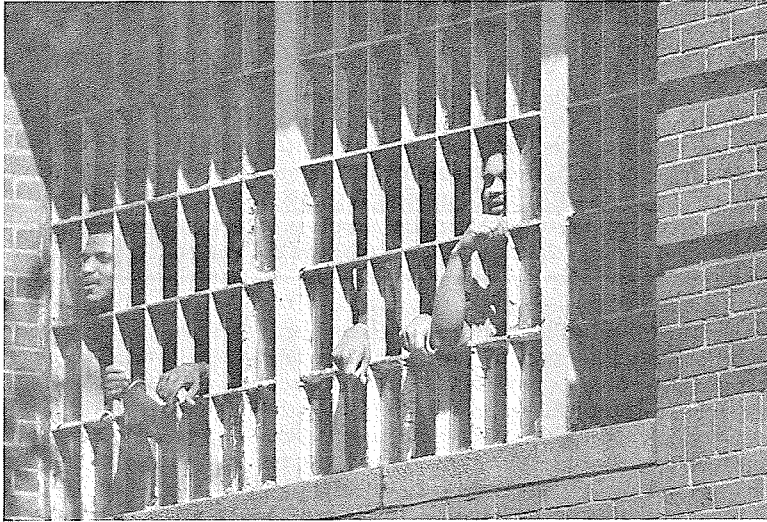
President Reagan’s Task Force on Violent Crime concluded in 1981 that Washington could do little about the underlying social causes of crime, but could help the states build more prisons. Currie, a sociologist on the California Governor’s Task Force on Civil Rights, argues that simply trying to get criminals off the streets won’t stop violent crime.

The United States, with the highest crime rates in the world, already jails a higher percentage of its population than any advanced country except the Soviet Union and South Africa. Indeed, the U.S. rate of incarceration increased by one-third between 1975 and 1981. Still, crime rates have continued to climb.

Why doesn’t imprisonment prevent violence? A study in Columbus, Ohio, suggests two answers. More than two-thirds of that city’s violent offenders had no previous felony convictions. And Columbus police made arrests for only 40 to 50 percent of violent crimes. (Findings of a Rand Corporation study of repeat felony offenders in California were even bleaker: Only one of 10 robbers was caught.)

The National Academy of Sciences estimates that reducing serious crime by 10 percent would require jailing 157 percent more people in California, 263 percent more in New York, and 310 percent more in Massachusetts. But U.S. prisons are already jammed. Half of all state prison inmates in 1978 were living in overcrowded prisons. Tripling the current prison population of some 300,000 might reduce crime by 20 percent, but the cost would be high: \$40 billion for new prisons and \$8 billion annually for operating expenses.

Is there a better way? Currie believes so. Conservatives, he says, have ignored successful prevention and rehabilitation programs. A Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) project, for example, reduced crime by offering ex-addicts jobs and counseling. According to MDRC cost-benefit analyses, the program saved taxpayers \$4,000 per client. Chicago’s Unified Delinquency Intervention program

SOCIETY


Paul Hosefros/New York Times Pictures.

Longer jail terms yield slim returns: By one estimate, a mandatory five-year sentence for felonies would reduce such crimes by only four percent.

dramatically reduced rearrests of youthful offenders—most of whom come from broken homes—by placing them in closely supervised group homes and providing jobs and education. The federal Child and Family Resources program produced similar results during the 1970s by providing counseling, tutoring, and meals for children at a cost of only \$3,000 per family.

The way to make America's streets safe, argues Currie, is to rebuild families, not to build jails.

Who Will Support the Children?

"Child Support Enforcement" by Philip K. Robins and Katherine P. Dickinson, in *Journal of the Institute for Socioeconomic Studies* (Summer 1982), Airport Rd., White Plains, N.Y. 10604.

Washington has long tried to pare Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) costs by prodding welfare mothers to work. Results have been mixed. Today, the most promising cost-cutting course may be a program designed to force absent fathers to support their children.

Enacted into law in 1935, AFDC was originally intended to aid children whose fathers had died. But by 1977, note Robins and Dickinson,