

The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison

Chapter Analysis

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Jeffery H. Reiman's classic book "The Rich Get Richer, and the Poor Get Prison" provides an interesting account of the issue of economic inequality, how the rich are being treated in a favourable way than the poor by the criminal justice system. Reiman's argument advances throughout the book with the representation of the sad reality that is hounding American society, as the tools of the criminal justice system are discriminately not used for the well-off people who have caused immeasurable harm to America because of their predatory business practices. The Rich Get Richer shows how much class bias is lurking around American society as the rich class uses their leadership to carry out mass victimization. On the contrary, Poor Get Prison develops a theoretical perspective to make readers understand that when the poor do the same crime as the rich, the criminal justice system fills prisons with the poor, which violates citizens' sense of basic fairness. This essay analyzes chapters 1 to 4 of Reiman's book to expose how anti-poor and unfair the entire criminal justice system of American society is, which leads to mass incarceration.

Chapter 1

Throughout Chapter 1, "Crime Control in America", Reiman emphasizes the notion that the poor are all innocent victims of the society persecuted by the evil rich and how it is more difficult to get by when you belong to a poor class in American society. He backs up his claim by narrating that the cases of drug abuse and other forms of violence could not be merely reduced by incarcerating all poor arrested drug users behind bars. Reiman, however, added that the decline in the number of heinous crimes around society is because of changing demographic characteristics, not because of the strict reinforcement of the government's imposed existing laws. The author furthers that the criminal justice system and the concerned authorities are so full of excuses that we as a nation have become lenient when it comes to imposing harsh laws. The second excuse Reiman disagrees with is that the industrialization of America has opened up many potential jobs that have taken away the opportunities to commit crimes. The author easily argues the first excuse by presenting facts and examples through graphs in the first chapter regarding the higher rate of incarceration in the United States than any other country, claiming that "we are not soft." The excuse for the industrialization of the US nation is easily argued by presenting the fact that there are many strangleholds in society for getting a job. Moreover, he suggests that the nation should use its power to decriminalize drugs and ban guns to prevent existing problems in our immediate society, such as drugs, prison, and poverty (Reiman and Leighton, 2015).

Chapter 2

Meanwhile, Reiman in chapter 2 “A Crime by Any Other Name” sheds light on racial, class, and gender bias as the criminal justice system incarcerates “male, poor, young, and black” to maintain the notion that the high percentage of the poor population commit heinous crimes. He reiterates throughout Chapter 2 that this stigmatic notion is being pushed by the current criminal justice system of the United States to protect the rich or hide the “white collar” crimes (Reiman and Leighton, 2015). He adds that by hiding, protecting, or neglecting “white-collar crimes” the criminal justice system deliberately ignores what really is detrimental to the American society.

Chapter 3

“And the Poor Get Prison”, chapter 3 of Reiman’s ingenious book about corrupt idealism, notes that prisoners behind bars are most likely coming from the lowest economic strata of American society. Reiman, through various instances and circumstances, exposes that the prisoners in jail are actually poor criminals who are immediately arrested and summoned to imprisonment because of the social inequality that prevails due to the failed criminal justice system in society. On the contrary, the wealthier class, which puts the nation’s security and sovereignty at stake, is just merely warned. He backs up his claim about the social inequality prevailing in American society through different treatments for the Blacks who commit crimes as they were mostly those who were unduly. He furthers that the laws and factors which are applied to other members of society to get out of jail are not merely applied to the “poor Blacks” as the criminals’ racial characteristics along with economic strata add up to their living state in the country; behind the bars of jail or freely roaming despite committing heinous crimes.

Chapter 4

In Reiman’s book chapter 4 “To the Vanquished Belong the Spoils”, he finds out the real reason behind the failure of the criminal justice system as it is not successfully addressing who commits the heinous crimes more and that is the rich class’ intention to keep the justice system as it is. He discusses that the elites prevent the current criminal justice system of the United States to define exactly “what justice is” and subsequently poor becomes the victim of social predicament (Reiman and Leighton, 2015). He debunks that the poor do not have enough money to change the justice system like the rich ones, so they are left behind in incarceration as the major perpetrators of mass victimization. He also stresses that the existing justice system of the country has “equated crime to the poor” as the system views them as the perpetrators who would engage themselves in crimes. This notion has pushed the society against the welfare of the poor.

In a nutshell, I found Reiman’s classic as an informative read as a whole as it bluntly debunks the unfair role of the existing criminal justice system that currently prevails in American society, which

promotes discrimination in the society among the poor or non-violent and rich criminals. It successfully states how certain social constructs keep the poor in prison, failing the criminal justice system for the populous but a victory for the rich while keeping them in places of power.

Works Cited

Reiman, Jeffrey, and Paul Leighton. Rich get richer and the poor get prison: Ideology, class, and criminal justice. Routledge, 2015.