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Race, Ethnicity, Crime, and Justice: an International Dilemma


"Racial and ethnic minorities are often overrepresented in justice systems around the world" (p. xii). Gabbidon explores this premise through insights drawn from the colonial model, as expressed by Tatum (1994). His thesis is that the impact of colonialism has been under-represented in understanding race, ethnicity and crime in an international context. He sets out to address this oversight with case studies of five countries with experience of colonialism. Overall, the book highlights the importance of an embedded colonial model. The thesis is theoretically grounded, well written - beginning particular aspects - and, given insufficient room for a more thoroughgoing analysis, explaining why and how the experience of colonialism impacts on an individual's chance of offending. This would be aided by a heavier emphasis on explanation over description. The book offers an impressive array of demographic and crime data, allowing a clearer narrative flow to develop, and a more compelling explanatory account, exploring the relationship between the data and the aims of the book.

The work would be significantly enhanced by a chapter offering a comparative perspective on the information presented, to draw out the author's conclusions more clearly on the similarities and differences of people of colour, over-represented in criminal justice systems across the world.
differences between the experiences of racial and ethnic minorities across the world. There could also be a greater, ongoing application of the colonial model offered throughout the book. Whilst the summary and concluding sections are helpful, they could perhaps go further and consider the implications of the data for the theory more fully. Similarly, whilst class and gender are also acknowledged to be important in understanding the race-crime relationship, this could be more clearly contextualised. An examination of the interaction between colonialism, socio-economic status and demographics, and its impacts on ethnic minority experience of crime and justice would offer greater explanatory power.

The book draws pertinent and valid conclusions, and maintains internal consistency. However, it could explore the nature of the relationship between race, ethnicity, crime and justice more deeply, and address how this relationship maintains across international contexts. Furthermore, the reader is left wondering about the author’s perspective on certain issues. For example, which aspects of the colonial model are important in maintaining the structural inequalities influential in criminality? Where should we look next to unpick the race-crime relationship? What is the race-crime relationship in countries with no history of colonialism? And why do comparatively few individuals subject to colonialism and its legacy resort to crime? Perspectives on these issues would have offered a more robust exploration of the thesis, and allowed for more compelling conclusions.

However, there is no doubt that the book justifies its premise. There is a need to understand the colonial experience of a country when interpreting minorities’ relationship to crime; and the ongoing over-representation of racial and ethnic minorities is an international dilemma in need of urgent attention. The need to contextualise modern-day phenomena in the criminal justice field is important and neglected, and this book goes a long way to highlighting and addressing this gap. Undergraduate courses on comparative criminology, race and ethnicity, and diversity and criminal justice would benefit from adding this book to their reading lists. It would also appeal to those interested in the nature of the race-crime relationship, and the historical analysis of contemporary criminal justice phenomena more generally.

References