

Why America Has One of the Highest Crime Rates in the World

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Much has been in the news about the crime problem. Having worked inside the walls of the largest walled prison in America, I have given a lot of thought about crime. One problem is, many inmates are unredeemable. Murderers sometimes murder other inmates and robbers sometimes rob other inmates.

The best answer is prevention, meaning preventing criminal behavior from developing in the first place. Often persons are introduced to crime by shoplifting. Sometimes, an older person entices a younger person, often one under age six, to shoplift. If caught, it is very unlikely that a six-year-old will be prosecuted. Or shoplifting is often committed by young persons, often from a poor family, who will steal candy or other small items.

Shoplifting is rewarding and fun for kids, especially poor kids. Furthermore, they often get away with it, which only reinforces the offense. They then eventually move on to bigger crimes, such as robbery.

Each fall, I am part of the week-long Creation Expo in Indianapolis presenting apologetics to churches. I usually stay in a hotel in the hood, which is across from a Walmart. In the past, shoplifting has made the store a mess. This time, it was completely remodeled, but I noted shoplifting was still a problem. While looking for socks and underwear, most of the packages were ripped open. For one popular brand, one pair was removed from every package, leaving two in the package. Obviously, the thief removed one pair to put it in his pocket, and walk out of the store, leaving the opened package with the two remaining pairs. The manager

explained to me that they could not sell opened packages, so trashed them.

Another example of theft was to select five items, pay for them, leave the store, and immediately return and select the same five items, then walk out of the store with them. If asked by an employee for a receipt, they simply show the person the receipt and walk out of the store. Theft was so great, I was told, that the store operated at a loss, but were unable to close the store because it was in a minority community and closing it could trigger charges of discrimination.

When I last shopped at this Walmart located in the hood, the clerk did not understand a word of English. She had a Google translator on her phone to which I asked my question, and it translated what I said into Spanish. She then answered my question in Spanish and the Google translator gave me the answer in English. The exchange ended up using over ten minutes of time.

California state law classifies stealing merchandise worth \$950 or less as a misdemeanor, which often means that law enforcement won't bother to investigate. If they do, the prosecutor will often refuse to prosecute. This was a common complaint against Kamala Harris. I understand this law has now changed.

My experience at a Barnes & Noble store reinforced this concern. While waiting to pay for the books I selected, a worker mentioned to her supervisor, who was then working at the checkout, that a customer had just walked out of the store with a stack of books which he did not pay for. She was told by the supervisor that store policy was to do nothing about the theft, adding this person has done the same thing several times before. I was at the checkout counter waiting to pay about fifty dollars for my selections and thought, "What is stopping me from just walking out of the store with my books?" In my case, my conscience was clear. You pay for the goods, even if you could just walk out of the store with them. In the end, my books will probably cost more in order to pay for the books that were stolen.

Valid reasons exist for Barnes & Noble policy. A Rite Aid employee was murdered recently after attempting to stop two store thieves. A confrontation within the store risks harming not only the store staff, but also the customers. For this reason, employees are commonly instructed by their managers to do nothing, as was true at Barnes & Noble. I wonder if the person stealing books did so to read them, or sell them. Since he could borrow them from the library for free, my guess was that he was going to sell them.

To help ameliorate the problem, California Governor Newsom recently signed a new law in which shoplifting is a felony even if it is below the \$950 limit, but only if the theft is part of an organized ring with the intent to sell the stolen goods. How is the clerk supposed to know this? Given that most of these thefts are by individuals, not groups, in the end this new law may have little effect on shoplifting. It will still be up to police and prosecutors to charge these offenses as felonies if they are reported to the police.

What is required is a change to the state law to makes all shoplifting a high misdemeanor and that over 100 dollars a felony. This will provide an incentive not to repeat shoplifting crimes. Like the sign in Rings Drugstore in Montpelier, Ohio, infers, "shoplifting is a crime that will be prosecuted." The crime must be dealt with at the first level to prevent developing career criminals. The United States tops the ranking of countries with the most prisoners. This approach (i.e., prison), costs 80,000 dollars a year for housing a single inmate.

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