

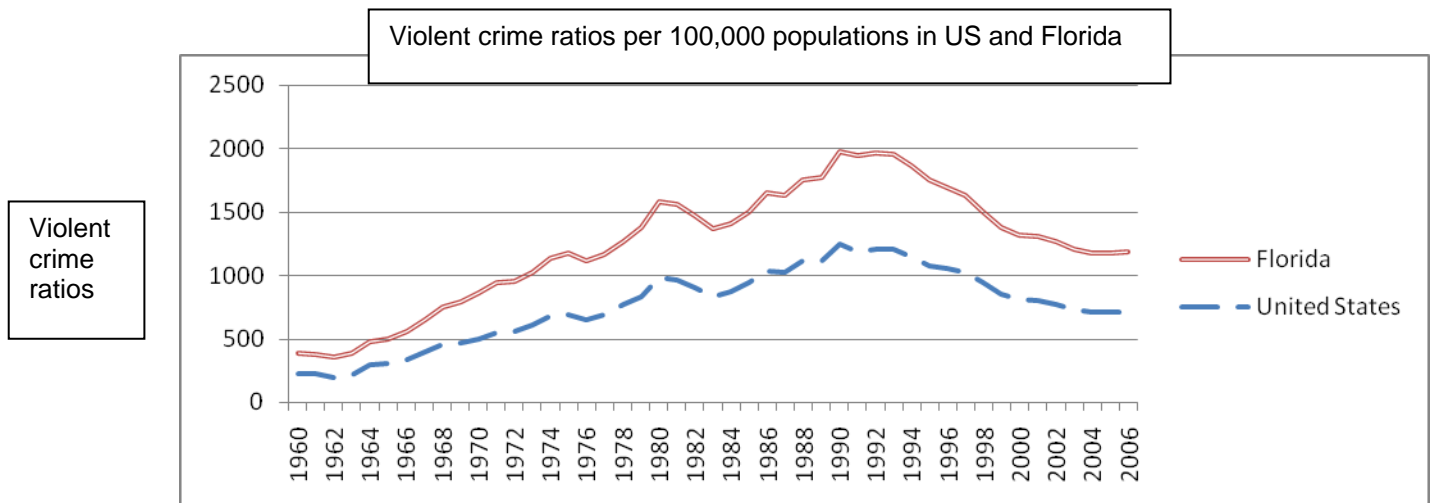
Exploitation and Subjugation = Corruption and Violence

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Florida politics are the politics of exploitation and subjugation of its citizenry. This was true when Florida entered the Union as a slave state and is just as true today. The most recent adaptation of these themes is the exploitation of the drug culture followed by the subjugation of large segments of its population in “get tough on crime.”

This political philosophy catapulted Florida to the top of the charts for violent crimes in the 70's and 80's. These trends associated with violent crimes remain true thru today: Florida held 3rd place in 2004, 4th place in 2005 and the ratios were up 2006 and again in 2007.



The question that falls out of forty plus years of violent crime statistics is: why has the state not recognized and effectively dealt with this reality as had New York, Texas and California?

The answer may rest in understanding the economics of Florida as well as the scope of the money involved. The exploitation of illegal activities is largely a product of the lack of natural resources and Florida's geographic location.

Florida serves as a bridge for smuggling products north to the USA and South to the Caribbean and Latin America. These smuggled products included slaves, guns, rum, revolutions, marijuana and cocaine.

Exploitation of drug smuggling was nothing more than allowing it to flourish through benign neglect starting in the early 1960s. By the 70s, Miami enjoyed a reputation as the drug capital of the U.S.

In 1981, it was estimated that 70% of all Marijuana and cocaine smuggled into the US came through south Florida. This was an industry worth between \$7 and \$12 billion dollars a year as opposed to the \$12 billion for real estate and \$9 billion for tourism.

Not to be ignored was the relationship between drug money and real estate development as a money laundering mechanism. It could be argued that illegal drugs became a cash cow for real estate development.

Estimates are that drug smugglers single-handedly kept Florida out of the tight money recession of that period. Miami was the only Federal Reserve Board Branch that reported a cash surplus while every other Federal Reserve Board in the country reported a deficit.

In 1981, Miami's Federal Reserve branch had a currency surplus of \$5 billion, mostly in drug-generated \$50 and \$100 bills. This cash surplus was more than the nation's twelve Federal Reserve banks combined.

The benign neglect of an extremely profitable illegal activity attracted the attention of and competition among assorted cartels and gangs. By 1981, Miami had become the murder capital of the US and it was beyond the state of Florida to control. Law enforcement suffered from lack of political support, manpower and corruption.

In 1981, the inauguration of President Reagan and an expose of drugs, crime and corruption in South Florida by Time Magazine set the stage for a major turning point for the war on drugs. On the surface there was a massive and well publicized cleansing effort to redeem south Florida.

In the end, the only significance was a temporary respite in violent crime and an end the era of the "cocaine cowboys". In its place emerged a more sophisticated drug smuggling operation supported by a refined money laundering business that has done nothing to stem the flow of drugs or halt the corruption and violence in Florida.

Out of this chaos emerges Florida's version of the war on crime and liberalizing concealed weapons permits. It could be argued Florida has been successful in turning around the violent crimes statistics but in reality the same forces affecting the down turns of violent crime throughout the country appear to also be at play in Florida.

Liberalizing concealed weapons permits was an acknowledgment that the state could not protect its citizenry.

Florida's version of get tough on crime was to create a prison empire whose incarceration ratio not only exceeds that of the US as a whole but also that of any country on God's green earth.

The largest role in this prison empire is played by the state's Department of Corrections with 95,000 inmates, 150,000 probationers, 28,000 employees and a budget of \$2.2 billion. A secondary role is played by county jails with over 60,000 inmates.

The state created a prison empire whose largest source of admission for the last 10 years has been dysfunctional foot soldiers of drug world. However, admission comes after these men and women are fleeced of cash and assets by the criminal justice community.

This same prison empire was rocked by a series of scandals starting in 1999 with the murder of Frank Valdez within the walls of Florida State Prison by correction officers. The scandal ended in 2007 with the incarceration of James V. Crosby, Secretary of the Department of Corrections for corruption.

On the surface there was a massive and well publicized cleansing effort to redeem the Department of Corrections. The casualties were 60 employees fired, the demotion of another 50 employees and the movement of another 100 employees. Not one union, legislature or affected individual contested these actions in court.

This cleansing has all the earmarks of the 1981 effort to lower the visibility of the 'cocaine cowboys' rather than institute structural changes that would affect the dynamics that gave birth to them.

An argument could be made that the reason no legal actions were taken in the state courts is that the matrix emerging from any serious investigations and trials could be applied to not only other areas of the criminal justice community and state agencies but the legislature as well.

This argument gains weight when considering how Crosby climbed the ladder of success. As reported by the St. Petersburg Times, 'he climbed it the old fashioned way, using his political skills to curry favor with state officials and the Police Benevolent Association, the union that represents corrections officers. He also established close relationships with lobbyists and the prison vendors who hire them.

Crosby's political connections culminated in his membership to the Republican state executive committee in the late 1990s and as a delegate for George W. Bush at the 2000 Republican National Convention. It should be noted that it took a conviction in federal courts to bring him down.

The question for the legislature is when are they going to address the dynamics that promote violent crime and corruption instead of exploiting it? If the legislature's support of "Truth, a generation united against tobacco." is used as precedence then the answer is never.