

Sociological criminology theories on the film american history x



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The film American History X is a film about crime fueled by racism. The crime was committed by a man named Derek Vinyard, a white supremacist. He murdered two black gang members after they attempted to steal his truck.

If we look closely at the case of Derek Vinyard, we can see that the crime he committed weren't just a spur-of-the moment thought of killing someone. His actions were rooted deep into his past, wherein his experiences have shaped him into the person that he was today. Certain aspects of his past have influenced his actions, including his environment, the companions that he keep, his experiences, and a lot more. We look at Derek Vinyard's life in relation to several sociological criminology theories, including the general strain theory and the differential association theory. In the film, we can see that there are certain social structures that exist, which affects the lives and actions of the characters.

It is evident in the film that there is dichotomy between different races. Blacks associated with blacks, whites grouped with whites and a lot more. The structure of the society leaned towards the separation of different cultures, which is why there is often conflict between them, instead of peacefully coexisting with each other. The protagonist, Derek Vinyard, grouped with other white males, proclaiming that the white race is the most superior, and should be the only existent race in the area.

Their actions have fueled fights with other groups, and Derek Vinyard harbored hatred of the blacks. Because of this hatred, he intently murdered two black men trying to steal his truck, leading him to a life in prison. The above scenario is the basis of the general strain theory in criminology. It is

assumed here that there are existing social structures in the society that encourages the people to commit crime (Collins, 2005).

In the case of Derek Vinyard, the separation of the different ethnic groups in the area has given him more reason to commit crime. For him and his group, killing the black guys trying to rob him was an act of honor, as he was able to rid the society of one of his enemies. The structure of the society has permitted the crime to happen because Derek and his white group were isolated from other ethnic groups. They were not able to experience living with them, and they weren't open for those things. The society tolerated the racial distinction, which has enabled the different races to develop hatred with one another.

Crimes like the one committed by Derek Vinyard were indeed possible because of the structure of the society. Aside from the structural social strain in the movie, the individual strain was also evident and was exhibited by Derek Vinyard. He experienced pain when his father, a firefighter, was killed by a black man while on a firefighting mission. Because of this, he has harbored deep hatred for those men, that even when he grew older, his feelings of hatred towards the blacks are still there. Because of that, he developed an insatiable need to make the lives of black people miserable, and violence is just one of his means.

He feels satisfied when he beats black people, and as shown in the film, he had a big smile when he killed the black men who tried to steal his car, even when was already apprehended by the authorities. In the film, it was shown that Derek Vinyard was a member of an all-white Venice Beach Neo-Nazi

gang, known as “ The Disciples of Christ”. All of them hated the black people, and they all encouraged acts of animosity and violence towards the black people. The group was also involved in several other illegal businesses and activities like robbing, illegal substance use, and many more. Derek treated his gang as family, and they even encouraged other white males to join them in their cause against the black people.

Derek practically grew up with these guys. When his father was murdered by a black man, all he has left was his brother, and eventually, the gang of white supremacists. According to the differential association theory in criminology, the interaction with other people teaches the individual certain values, attitudes, techniques, and motives that would account for criminal behavior (Sutherland, 2007). The movie effectively portrayed the people surrounding Derek Vinyard before he was jailed, as racists just like him. They did a lot of bad things to people from other culture, especially the black ones.

Based on the differential association theory, Derek Vinyard may have been influenced by the people surrounding him to become a criminal. He happily killed the two black men because he believed that it is the right thing to do, since it's what he learned from the people he often interacted with. They would often harass other people, rob stores, and do other negative things. His relationship with these people strengthened his hatred towards blacks, which eventually lead to his incarceration because of murder.

At the end of the film, he realized that his actions weren't really the best as a person. He learned to accept other people by constantly interacting with

people from other races. His hatred has eventually faded, and his focus was more on the welfare and security of his brother. He's afraid that his brother might follow his footsteps, and he doesn't want him to experience what he has.

He was able to reconcile with his brother and was able to clear things up for him. However, it was too late because his brother has been involved with the same people that lead to his demise.