

**Bruce Jacobs and Richard Wright.****Street Justice.**

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This short work deals with retaliation by street-level criminals in St. Louis Missouri who reported themselves victimized by their peers. The sample consisted of 52 African Americans interviewed in a university milieu. They were each paid a modest \$40 to \$50 and brought into the milieu by a street-wise community person who had worked on other projects with the researchers. The argument is that much violence is associated with retaliation and counter-retaliation. The authors explore the different types of retaliation and why the criminals resort to this approach to deal with their self-reported victimization rather than refer the matter to the police and the justice system. The book is crammed with interesting quotes and vignettes depicting the victimization and the retaliation it engendered. The core chapter offers a typology of retaliation actions, or sometimes inaction, and describes from the respondents' perspectives the precipitating incidents, the rationales for the retaliation and the action taken. While the categories of retaliation discussed range from face-to-face to indirect, immediate to delayed, reflexive or not, and so on, it is emphasized that in this street-level, low-status criminal milieu, the number one preference of the victimized criminals is for face-to-face, immediate retaliation. There is also an interesting chapter on gender and retaliation where the authors' central point is that generally the same issues underlie the victimization and retaliation motifs of males and females, but the processes are different in that the women usually draw more on other persons to help them retaliate.

There is an interesting chapter too on "the retaliatory ethic." Here the authors argue that the criminal victims do not refer their victimization to the justice system, partly because they expect the police would not take them seriously, and partly because they think the justice system's response would not be immediate or punitive enough. The respondents are depicted as marginalized persons, having low status vis-à-vis the mainstream legitimate world, and believing that, should they not retaliate, they would invite further victimization and forfeit whatever status they have in their own milieu. The authors suggest rather than detail the subculture of the street-level criminal but their quotes make clear that violence, self-loathing, status seeking, and survival are key features. That subculture is exemplified in the pervasive use by respondents of six words, namely "ass," "nigger," "bitch," "shit," "fuck" and "respect."

In the conclusion the authors discuss how to reduce this considerable violence, which they acknowledge generates much fear for public safety. They suggest that police perhaps should take victimization against criminals more seriously and here they point to the recent change in police response to victimization against sex workers as a possible prototype. But they acknowledge that the victim criminals do not have any time for the justice system and the police so it is not clear whether any unilateral change by the police would make a difference; the clash of the street criminals' subculture with the mainstream system would seem to trump all such initiatives. So, what else to do? The authors decry the demise of informal community social control (i.e., the "old heads" often referred to in sociological literature) but that era of inner city life when there was a strong stable working class headed by males employed in factories and plants is unlikely to return any time soon. So the authors emphasize gun control and quick intervention by the police to forestall escalation of conflicts. Surprisingly, they do not mention effective community-based policing though it seems clear that knowing who did what and when in order to intervene quickly and effectively would

require significant police presence, especially as the retaliation experiences they discuss seem idiosyncratic and individual, not team efforts as in gang warfare.

The authors have made a contribution to the understanding of street justice. Their study was innovative and interesting in substance. The limits of the contribution are quite evident as well. The methodology used gets at how the criminal victims present their victimization and retaliatory actions but these are essentially social constructions without corroborating observational data, and, as in other social constructions, may serve many purposes in the interactional setting. The male criminal victims for example depict themselves to the interviewers as basically above retaliating against females, something incongruent with known patterns of assault in the criminal milieu. The typology of retaliation developed by the authors appears to have emerged from their interviewing and it may not be particularly heuristic outside that context. There is of course no indication of the relative frequency or importance of the different types of retaliation strategies. It might well have been useful, for theoretical development, for the authors to relate the individualized and idiosyncratic patterns they explored with the more classic forms of retaliation – utilitarian retaliation and counter-retaliation – among criminal gangs. The authors' discussion of the policy implications of their work is valuable but could have been elaborated more. They suggest that, in the end, the key to reducing the criminal victims' retaliation which often threatens public safety is police action in seizing the criminal's guns and becoming more proactive in preventing the spread of retaliation and counter-retaliation. Such police action would appear to require greater police presence and more street-level intimate knowledge by the officers. How feasible that is, is not discussed. Ultimately, as the authors acknowledge the key is getting at the marginality, the zero-level social status that translates into a violent quest for "respect" in the face of slights and modest victimization.

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