

## **Chapter 1**

### **1.1 Critical Thinking**

1. Do you think the news media is obligated to present a balanced picture of the overall crime problem and reduce their presentation of sensational crimes? Why or why not?

Most, if not all, people agree that the media should present a balanced picture of crime, but most realistic people know that this is unlikely, especially since the American public responds enthusiastically to sensational crime coverage.

2. How much do you think the public conception of crime is influenced by the media?

Although most people are loath to admit that they have been overly influence by the media, they usually have been. In addition, as you learn more about the myths and facts of criminal justice over the course of this semester, you will uncover more of your own misconceptions.

### **1.2 Critical Thinking**

1. Given what you know about crime in the United States, do you think that the criminal justice system is a strong institution of social control? Why?

Your answer will depend on your opinions of the efficacy of the criminal justice system. If you believe that the system is overall efficient, you will likely see it as a stronger institution of social control than will students who do not.

2. Do you think that other institutions such as the family, schools, and organized religion are better institutions of social control than the criminal justice system? If so, which ones? Why?

Your answer will partially depend upon how efficient you believe the criminal justice system is. It also depends on your personal beliefs regarding the importance of family and other social institutions in regulating behavior. You may also cite family, schools, and organized religion as more important institutions because of their consistent influence on a young person's life.

### **1.3 Critical Thinking**

1. Do you think the criminal justice system “works” in the United States? Why or why not?

Your answer may be based upon the values that you assign to individual factors such as deterrence, rehabilitation, crime prevention, and crime education. You may feel that the system works overall, but nearly everyone can find room for improvement.

2. What improvements do you think should be made to the criminal justice system?

You can cite ways in which each of the three criminal justice agencies—police, courts, and corrections—can improve. These can include better training, better community relations, less procedural errors, and many other suggestions.

3. Do you think judges should be limited in the sentences they are allowed to impose? Why or why not?

Most people agree that the punishment for minor offenses should be limited with a maximum possible sentence. For example, a petty theft offense should not receive more than a short period of incarceration. Many people also feel that serious offenses should restrict sentences to those fitting the severity of the crime; for example, murderers should not be given short sentences or probation. Other people believe, however, that judges should have unlimited discretion to apply sentences based on the facts of each individual case.

#### **1.4 Critical Thinking:**

1. What do you think are some of the positive aspects of having a criminal justice “nonsystem”?

You can name the system of checks and balances caused by interdependent agencies working together.

2. What do you think are some of the disadvantages of having a criminal justice “nonsystem”?

Disadvantages include: the general lack of organization and predictability of the criminal justice system; the wide variety of training, professionalism, and education among criminal justice professionals; and the influence of personal and institutional biases, which affects criminals in different ways.

**1.5 Critical Thinking:** Do you think more money needs to be spent on criminal justice? Why or why not?

Answers will vary. Some people feel that more money needs to be spent, others feel that the money that is currently being spent should be spent in different ways, and others call for a reduction in spending.

**1.6 Critical Thinking:** What do you think are some of the most common myths about the criminal justice system?

Answers will vary, but you will probably think of many examples. One common example is the way in which the media misrepresents crime as extraordinarily violent and unusual; you may think of this because the textbook mentions it. Another example is the way in which certain types of sentencing and punishments are seen by the public as a cure-all, but end up having poor or even negative results; one famous example of this was the Scared Straight program for juveniles. Yet another example is the way in which the criminal justice system chooses to perpetuate myths, such as by racial profiling.