

The Cambridge Socio-Legal Group Occasional Seminar Series

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The Rockefeller Drug Laws: A Socio-legal analysis of the most punitive drug laws in the United States

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The Rockefeller Drug Laws were adopted by the New York State Legislature in 1973 and gave New York the distinction of having the most punitive drug laws in America. The penalty for selling two ounces (56 grams) or in possession of four ounces (113 grams) of cocaine, heroin, morphine, marijuana, or opium was the same for second-degree murder: a mandatory 15 years in prison.

This presentation will provide an overview of the Rockefeller Drug Laws and their social implications. The Laws will be tied into America's 'War on Drugs' and how the singular emphasis on incarceration has resulted in the largest prison system in the world. The most recent statistics show that one in 30 men between ages 20-34 is behind bars, the figure is one in nine for black males in that age group.

From the late 19th Century into the 1960's, Jim Crow Laws denied blacks full participation in American society. America's administration of justice will be explored to show how its drug policies/laws and operational priorities have re-created another era of Jim Crow segregation.

Bob Costello holds a Master's degree in Sociology and a Juris Doctor degree both from St. John's University (New York), a Master's degree in Criminal Justice from SUNY Albany, and a Doctor of Education degree from Dowling College (New York). His articles have appeared in law journals housed at University of California (UC) Berkeley, UC Davis, University of San Francisco, Princeton University, and SUNY Albany among others. He is a former Faculty Seminar Member at Columbia University and currently is a Research Associate at The Center for Children, Families and the Law at Hofstra University School of Law. Recently he was placed on the Fulbright Senior Specialist roster for the next five years.

Thursday 15th October 2009, 5.15pm – 7.00pm

B3, Institute of Criminology, Sidgwick Avenue, Cambridge, CB3 9DA

Research and LLM Students welcome