

H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

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Freakonomics - Fascinating!

Have you ever read the book, "Freakonomics," by Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner? I read it a few years ago and thought it was an interesting book. Recently, I came across another copy and reread it. It must have been better the second time around because the best word I can use to describe it is fantastic.

The authors take standard principles of economic analysis and apply them to unconventional subjects to arrive at startling conclusions. One section seems to explain how Donald Trump got elected when all the polls showed him losing. To put it simply, many of his supporters were ashamed to admit they supported him. Two previous elections were examined where the polls did not match the results.

In 1989, David Dinkins ran for mayor of New York against Rudolph Giuliani - a black candidate against a white candidate. The polls showed Dinkins (the black man) winning by 15% yet he only won by a few percentage points. In 1990, white supremacist David Duke ran for the U.S. Senate in Louisiana. He got nearly 20% more of the vote than was predicted (but still lost). In both cases, voters essentially lied to pollsters because they didn't want to admit to anyone that they were racists. I think it was the same with Trump. People secretly supported him but didn't want to admit publicly that they wanted a man of his character for president.

Another area the authors chose to analyze was the impact of Roe v Wade on the crime rate. The essential premise is that the people who are most likely to become addicted to drugs or commit crimes as adults were unwanted children. After abortion was legalized, it cut down on the number of unwanted children. Because those unwanted children were never born, the crime rate began to drop 20 years later. There was no other provable factor that could have caused the drop in the crime rate.

The authors stopped there, but I would take the analysis one step further. Because of the push back by pro-lifers to restrict abortion for poor people, crime is once again on the rise. Women are once again being forced to have unwanted children.

I was discussing this topic with a fellow prisoner and he made a profound comment about pro-lifers: love the fetus but hate the child. It seems true. Those same voters and elected officials that fight so hard to restrict abortion and access to contraception are the same ones who want to cut social programs for the poor to ensure they have miserable lives.