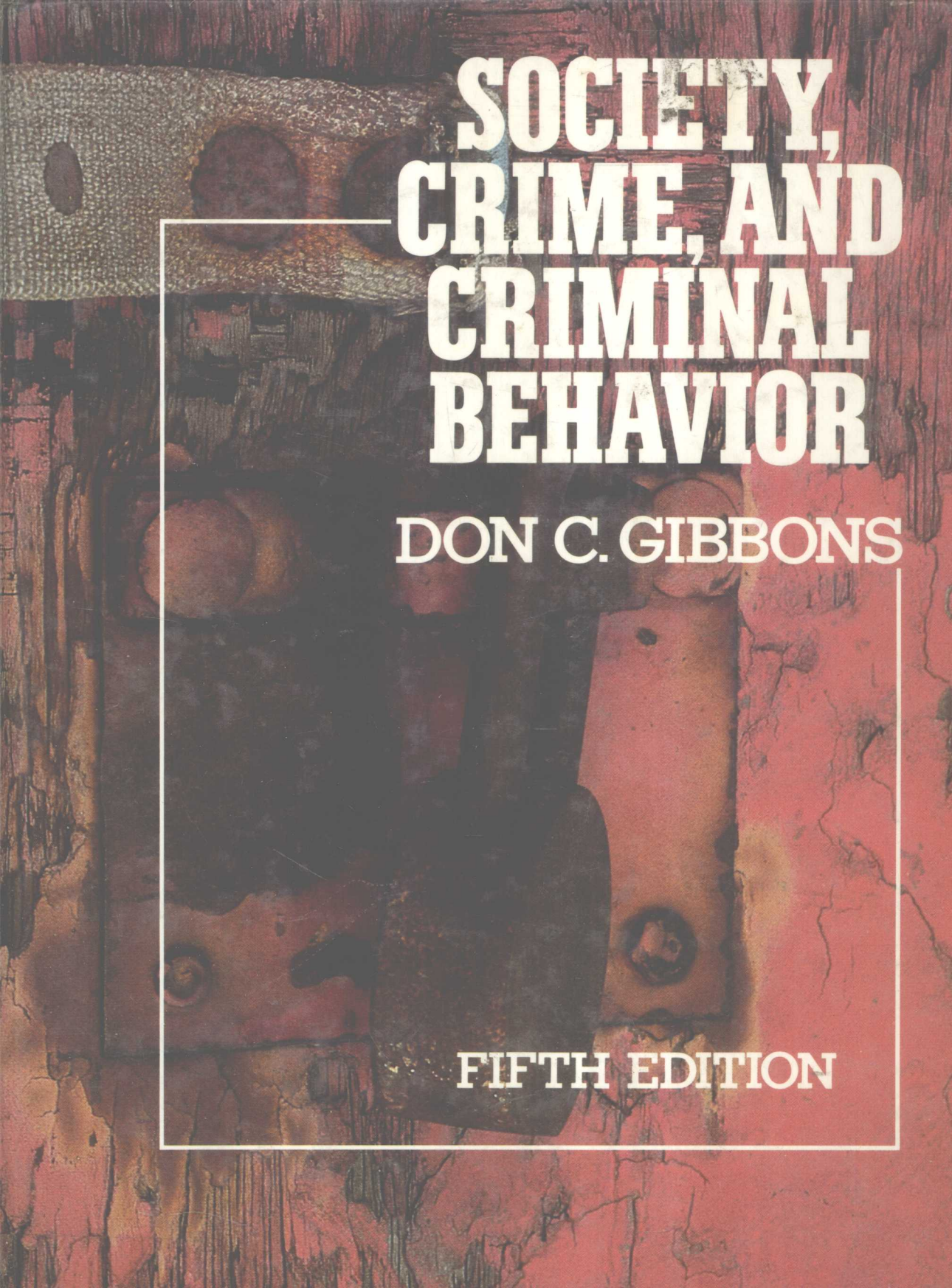
SOCIETY, CRIME, AND CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR
DON C. GIBBONS
FIFTH EDITION

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To Carlo Lastrucci,

teacher, critic, and good friend

PREFACE

This is the fifth version of a book originally published in 1968. In my own opinion, at least, each succeeding edition improved upon the one that preceded it. At the same time, there is considerable similarity between this edition and the one that it replaces. Much of what was written in the preface to the fourth edition remains true.

A few central themes concerning lawbreaking in modern societies run throughout this book and provide coherence to it. Perhaps the most important is the emphasis upon the ubiquity of crime in contemporary American society. At one time or another, most of us are touched by acts of lawbreaking, either as victims or offenders. Conversations about "our burglary" have become commonplace at social gatherings such as cocktail parties; other indications of the ubiquity of crime are easy to find as well.

Abundant hard evidence on the ubiquity of crime is presented in the pages of this book. The statistics and data summarize the experiences of individuals in this society. In the years since this book first appeared, my own house and car have been burglarized, my wife has twice had her purse stolen and also has lost a bicycle to thieves, and finally, my wallet was stolen from my coat pocket while I was in my office, busily typing a report to the federal Law Enforcement Assistance Administration!

This book also indicates that crime is the product of "criminogenic" features which are built into modern societies—that is, social conditions that are implicated both in conformity and lawbreaking. The student of social behavior can learn a great deal about social values and social structure by examining crime and reactions to it. For example, the criminological literature on organized crime is a rich source of information on ethnic status, ethnic succession, and upward mobility in American society. Organized crime has often been a major route of upward mobility for persons who have been on the receiving end of economic and social discrimination. Similarly, garden-variety street crime reveals a good deal about the pressures experienced by persons who live in relative poverty

within a generally affluent society. Some of the alienated members of the underclass turn to crime as a crude form of income redistribution.

This book argues that criminals are most often normal persons who are responding to economic pressures or other features of the social structure of complex societies rather than flawed individuals whose lawbreaking can be accounted for by biological or psychological explanations. This text is an introduction to the criminological enterprise—that is, a branch of sociological inquiry devoted to the study of lawmaking, lawbreaking, and social responses to violations of criminal laws. At the same time, biological forces or psychological pressures may play some part in certain kinds of criminality; these influences are also given some attention in the pages of this book.

Most of the chapters of this book have been extensively revised, and a good deal of new material has been added to each of them. For example, a new discussion of income inequality and crime is included in the chapter on predatory property crime, new material on forcible rape appears in the chapter on violent crimes, and recent developments in radical-Marxist criminology are considered in another chapter. Additionally, this edition contains an entirely new chapter on political crime. Finally, I have pruned out claims that seem unsupportable in the light of recent evidence. I have also attempted to bring all of the sections of the book up to date, by including most of the relevant theoretical developments and research studies that have appeared in the past few years.

Because I banged out the revised pages and sections of this book on my IBM Selectric I typewriter, I do not have any secretarial assistance to acknowledge. However, I would like to express my appreciation to my colleague Joseph F. Jones, for his advice and helpful suggestions concerning this book. Prentice-Hall reviewers Steven F. Messner, State University of New York at Albany and George F. Stine, Millersville University provided useful suggestions for this revision. Additionally, Charles Bolton, Kenneth Polk, Peter Garabedian, and Carlo Lastrucci all offered helpful comments about the chapter on political crime. Finally, and most important of all, I want to thank my wife, Carmen, for all manner of help and support that she has provided over many years.

Don C. Gibbons

CONTENTS

1

CRIME IN MODERN SOCIETY

"Crime is merely a left-handed form of human endeavor," declared W. R. Burnett in his fine novel, *The Asphalt Jungle,* which was later made into one of the most authentic crime movies produced in the United States. The central theme in Burnett's book was that lawbreaking and law-abiding conduct are two sides of the same coin. These activities go hand in hand, and both forms reflect the character of the societies in which they appear. Burnett put forth the thesis that the core values around which American society is organized generate the seeds from which crime grows. In a society in which success is measured almost entirely in terms of material accomplishments and "getting ahead," the moral sensibilities of many of those persons who get caught up in the struggle for wealth and material goals become attenuated. As a result, they begin to lie, cheat, steal, or to follow other illicit pathways to success. Burnett also endeavored to show us that the markers that separate law-abiding individuals from lawbreakers are relatively indistinct in American society and that great numbers of citizens in all walks of life are involved in one form or another of dishonest or illegal conduct.

W. R. Burnett is a novelist who has written a number of books dealing with crime. He is an acute observer whose reports about criminality in American society ring true. However, it can hardly be said that his views are widely shared by members of the general population in the United States.

Crime is clearly a topic of enduring interest to most Americans, as any quick perusal of the mass media in this society will show. For example, a number of the leading television programs in the 1980s have dealt with the police and their problems with miscreants and lawbreakers.[1] But, most of this popular attention is focused on "crime in the streets" and what some have termed garden-variety crime—robberies, simple thefts, assaults, rapes, and a few other crude and forceful offenses. Corporate crime and other violations engaged in by socially powerful persons are less often noticed; equally obscured are various mundane, low-level violations of the law that are common in complex societies.

Popular conceptions of the crime problem diverge in another way from the picture offered by Burnett. These lay notions of the crime problem bear much similarity to nineteenth-century British stereotypes embraced by many who believed that crime was the work of "the dangerous classes."[2] In this view of things, malefactors are depraved or alien, antisocial beings in a society in which most of us are law abiding and upright in character.[3] Lawbreakers are thought to be the products of unusual circumstances involving such things as biological quirks or disruptions of normal family life. Most laypersons seem unimpressed by sociological arguments holding that offenders are often impelled toward criminality by forces which arise out of the social and economic order of modern societies.

Many Americans appear to have a love-hate relationship with lawbreaking: they are both fascinated by portrayals of crime in the mass media and at the same time fearful of the prospects of being robbed, burglarized, assaulted, or victimized in some other way. The apprehensiveness of citizens about crime in the streets has been amply documented. For example, opinion surveys undertaken in the past three decades have repeatedly shown that most people feel that

crime is a worsening problem in their communities, although curiously many of them do feel safe near their homes, even when they live in high crime areas.[4] Most often Americans have attributed lawbreaking to the breakdown of moral standards or kindred factors rather than to deleterious social conditions. Moreover, most have embraced repressive or punitive measures, rather than ameliorative steps, to curb crime.

Most popular beliefs about criminality in modern societies do not survive close examination. For one thing, it is by no means clear that American society is currently undergoing a crime wave of massive proportions, such that lawbreaking is increasing at an alarming rate. Indeed, as we see in Chapter 5, crime rates have been *decreasing* in this country in recent years. Although accurate American crime statistics spanning pre-twentieth-century periods are not available, historical accounts suggest that lawlessness was exceedingly common at earlier points in American history.[5] Then, too, it would be well to acknowledge that apparent surges or waves of crime may actually reflect increased reporting of offenses or the proliferation of new laws rather than changes in the levels of lawbreaking. One instructive report in this regard is a Portland, Oregon, victimization survey which indicated that the incidence of burglary declined in that city in 1973 to 1974 from the level observed in 1971 to 1972. At the same time, the proportion of burglary incidents reported to the police increased during this period. The result was that the official burglary rate increased, creating the erroneous impression that burglary was on the rise in Portland.[6] Some criminologists have argued that apparent increases in forcible rape and certain other crimes in recent years may similarly reflect increased crime reporting rather than actual changes in crime amounts.

Whatever the truth concerning crime waves, the fact remains that criminological research has amply documented Daniel Bell's claim that crime is an American way of life.[7] In modern American society crime is found everywhere: on the streets, in college buildings, in corporate board rooms, in "Skid Row" alleys, and on the highways. In short, there are myriad forms and generous amounts of lawbreaking in modern societies; criminality and criminals are clearly not relatively rare in the United States.

Citizen perspectives on crime causation are also fatally flawed.[8] Although bizarre acts of criminality carried on by persons suffering from personality pathology are sometimes encountered, these make up only a very small part of the crime problem in modern societies. The lion's share of crime in America and elsewhere reflects societal conditions which operate as the root causes of this activity. For example, abundant evidence links organized crime in our society to ethnic status, economic discrimination directed at certain ethnic groups, and pressures toward upward mobility that are experienced by nearly all citizens, conformists and lawbreakers alike. Also, organized crime is often related to efforts by lawmakers to legislate morality by forbidding people to gamble, drink, or engage in other activities that many of them would like to pursue. Similarly, garden-variety street crime is usually carried on by persons who are mired in situations of economic precariousness but who are also surrounded by highly visible signs of affluence on the part of many of their more fortunate neighbors.

Some of these alienated and resentful members who feel the sting of relative deprivation in an acquisitive society try to bring about income distribution at gunpoint or through other illegal means.

The discussion thus far has touched upon some major themes or broad contentions about crime. These themes stand as core propositions of the criminological perspective to which most sociological criminologists hold allegiance. Let us examine these perspectives in a bit more detail.

THE UBIQUITY OF CRIME IN MODERN SOCIETY

Although many of the facts concerning crime in modern society are in dispute, there is little question that lawbreaking is omnipresent in contemporary America. Masses of evidence are at hand which indicate that criminality is extremely common in this country and much more frequent than in most other industrialized nations of the world. Although Chapter 5 examines the existing data on crime in detail, a quick look at a handful of crime statistics will amply illustrate our point.

Consider some indicators of the pervasive nature of lawbreaking in America: According to statistics collected by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, there were 18,690 murder and nonnegligent manslaughter cases, 84,230 forcible rape incidents, 485,010 robberies, and 685,350 instances of aggravated assault reported to the police in the United States in 1984. Also, the police were informed of 2,984,000 burglaries, 6,591,900 larcenies, and 1,032,200 cases of car theft.[9] These figures indicate that 11,881,800 serious crimes were reported to the police in a single year, in a nation with a total population of 236,158,000 citizens.

However, these figures only begin to tell the story of crime in America. What about all those offenses that, for one reason or another, persons fail to report to the police? Some indication of the extent of "the dark figure of crime"—that is, unreported or undetected lawbreaking—is offered in Table 1, derived from the results of the National Crime Survey carried out by the U.S. Bureau of the Census in collaboration with the federal Department of Justice. In that survey, a national sample of individuals and households representative of the country as a whole was interviewed about experience with crime during 1982. The results were then employed as the basis for estimates of the total number of victimizations that occurred in the United States in 1982. For the discussion here the most important observation from Table 1 is that, of a number of crimes surveyed, less than half were reported to the police. It is thus clear that official statistics drastically understate the magnitude of crime in the nation.

These data reveal something about the extent of garden-variety crimes in the United States, but they provide only a partial accounting of lawbreaking. In particular, official crime statistics and citizens' reports of victimization reveal little about so-called white-collar criminal acts carried on by corporations and other business organizations. Although these latter kinds of lawbreaking are widespread and very costly in terms of harm inflicted upon the general public, they often are low-visibility offenses. They are much less frequently brought to our attention by the mass media than are dramatic instances of garden-variety

Table 1 Estimated Number of Personal and Household Victimizations, United States, 1982[a]

TYPE OF VICTIMIZATION	TOTAL	PERCENT REPORTED TO THE POLICE	PERCENT NOT REPORTED TO THE POLICE	PERCENT UNKNOWN WHETHER REPORTED TO THE POLICE
Personal victimizations				
rape and attempted rape	152,570	53	45	2
robbery	1,333,620	56	42	2
assault	4,972,832	46	51	3
personal larceny with contact	577,125	33	66	1
personal larceny without contact	14,975,908	27	71	2
Household victimizations				
burglary	6,662,843	49	49	1
larceny	9,704,598	27	72	1
vehicle theft	1,376,866	72	26	1

[a]Edward F. McGarrell and Timothy J. Flanagan, eds., *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics, 1984* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, 1985), p. 273.

crime. Then, too, business crimes often touch upon a diffuse collection of victims, many of whom are unaware that they have been victimized. It is for reasons of this sort that much white-collar lawbreaking goes unrecognized.

It takes only a bit of digging to unearth abundant evidence on white-collar crime.[10] For example, reports are available which document widespread criminal violations by major pharmaceutical manufacturers in the United States.[11] In one of these, Kurtz drew attention to a number of cases in which laboratory test results which showed that new drugs had harmful side effects were tampered with or hidden from the Food and Drug Administration.[12] These drugs were then placed on the market and administered to patients, even though the offending companies were aware of their serious, negative side effects, such as blood disorders, liver damage, cataracts, or severe hair loss. Extremely lenient penalties were standard in these cases, which has been shown to be true of other corporate offenses as well. Kurtz argued that the Food and Drug Administration rarely goes beyond wrist-slapping of drug manufacturers because it is dominated by officials with ties to the organizations that it is supposed to police.

The crime problem in modern societies also involves a very large number of less dramatic but commonplace offenses that one criminologist has termed "folk crimes."[13] These are violations of laws introduced to solve problems arising out of the increased complexity and division of labor in modern societies. Traffic-law violations, "chiseling" on unemployment compensation, and violations of regulatory statutes governing business and commerce are instances of folk crime. Folk or mundane crime also includes such low-visibility offenses as failure on the part of divorced spouses to provide child-support payments, violations of fish and game laws,[14] and vandalism in public parks,[15] all of which are widespread. Most folk crimes provoke only mild social responses, carry only a low degree of social stigma, and are often engaged in by persons of

high social status. They are also dealt with in a variety of administrative ways; for example, traffic-law-violation cases are disposed of through special bureaus, bail forfeiture, and in other ways outside of courts. Although it is easy to minimize their significance, because such folk crimes make up a large part of modern-day criminality, they cannot be ignored or dismissed as "not really crimes."

That lawbreaking is frequent and widespread in American society is one claim with which criminologists do not quarrel. There is, however, a good deal of disagreement among them regarding the rates of criminality that are assumed to be associated with different groups in our society. In particular, opinions differ markedly as to whether crime is more frequent among blacks than whites. Some criminologists maintain that American blacks are more frequently involved in lawbreaking than are whites. But, in the view of many others, this seemingly excessive criminality reflects discriminatory law enforcement on the part of the police rather than inordinate involvement in criminality on the part of blacks. Then, too, those who assert that black citizens are more heavily implicated in crime base their arguments on statistics of reported garden-variety crimes and slur over the contrary evidence on unreported crime and white-collar criminality.

Criminological opinions are also divided on the question of social class and crime. Perhaps it is true, as conventional crime statistics suggest, that criminal acts are concentrated among those persons who are at the bottom of the economic heap in our society. Yet it may well be that these data are highly misleading, and that they provide indicators of law-enforcement practices rather than the distribution of crime. If it were possible to assemble data on all of the forms of criminality that exist in our society, including garden-variety offenses, white-collar crime, and folk or mundane crime, it might be discovered that lawbreaking is actually distributed in some other way, perhaps as one of the broadly sketched crime distributions in Figure 1, which contrasts the "conventional" pattern (A) with four alternatives (B, C, D, and E).

In Figure 1, pattern A illustrates the view that crime rates are highest among groups on the bottom of the economic ladder. Pattern B places the highest rates of lawbreaking among groups at the top of the social-class structure. Pattern C represents the hypothesis that equal rates of crime occur across social-class groups, while D portrays the idea that crime rates are highest among middle-income citizens. Finally, pattern E represents a bimodal distribution of criminality, with highest rates among both the economically most advantaged and least advantaged in our society.

Many analysts in the United States have opted for the hypothesis that deviant behavior and criminality are most common among the economically disadvantaged strata.[16] At the same time, other criminologists find this argument unpersuasive. The latter group includes Marxist or radical criminologists who contend that members of a ruling class and other socially powerful citizens are most involved in criminal acts in capitalist societies. Still other criminologists have reached conclusions on this issue that parallel pattern C in Figure 1—that there is no significant link between social-class position and criminality.[17] For example, a survey of residents of New Jersey, Oregon, and Iowa conducted by Charles Tittle and Wayne Villemez in 1972 quizzed persons as to whether they