



CRIMINOLOGY

SECOND EDITION

PIERS BEIRNE
JAMES MESSERSCHMIDT

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University of Southern Maine

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Never did we expect that the demand for *Criminology* would justify a second edition so soon after publication of the first! In this new edition, we have tinkered with the original organization of chapters so that the structure of the book has an added coherence and a tighter feel to it. Where necessary, we have revised certain sections of the book, in some cases adding material, in others, subtracting. New and up-to-date empirical data are presented throughout the book, and we discuss types of crime not previously addressed, including hate crimes, homosexual partner battering, crimes against animals, and collective embezzlement.

The aim of *Criminology* is to introduce the basic aspects of modern criminology to undergraduate students. This is no easy task in such a diverse discipline as criminology. All textbook authors have to make a number of hard choices. This book very much reflects our teaching experience in the undergraduate criminology program at the University of Southern Maine, where our course in criminology both surveys the major areas of the discipline and also provides an introduction to more specialized, upper-level courses in criminology. We have attempted to strike a balance between depth of analysis and breadth of coverage and to make the book comprehensive in its coverage of the sociological aspects of criminology. While we aim to survey all the major aspects of the field, we especially emphasize the importance of historical, feminist, and comparative perspectives on crime.

This book is divided into three parts. **Part One (Chapters 1–3)** focuses on two surprisingly difficult questions: What is crime? How can we measure crime? Chapter 1 outlines the two major ways in which popular discourse about crime is articulated—through the mass media and through the pronouncements of the moral entrepreneurs of social problems—and it summarizes the key elements of crime as a legal category. The chapter stresses the importance of sociological definitions of crime and introduces the three key sociological concepts of criminology: crime, criminal law, and criminalization. Chapter 2 outlines the major sources of crime data. These include both official crime data (the F.B.I.'s *Uniform Crime Reports*, the *National Crime Victimization Survey*, and records of various federal agencies) and unofficial crime data (self-report studies, participant observation, biographies, and comparative and historical data). We stress here that crime data can never represent criminal behavior objectively, because there are inherent biases in the way that all data are conceived and constructed. Data do not speak for themselves! How crime data are explained, therefore, depends both on criminologists' concepts of crime and on the assumptions underlying their theories of crime. The importance of this point will become clear as the contents of the book unfold. In Chapter 3, we offer a critical

sociological perspective on the relationship between crime and structured social inequality. We examine the influence on patterns of crime and victimization in the United States of four major forms of social inequality: class, gender, race, and age.

Part Two (Chapters 4–9) provides an introduction to various types of crime. Typologies of crime can be constructed in an infinite variety of ways. We have chosen a sociological typology that combines (1) those crimes usually defined in the legal codes and (2) those outside the criminal law that have received much attention in the sociological literature. Because crime is found in every social institution, the chapters in Part Two offer a comprehensive understanding of the nature, extent, types, and costs of crime not only in the street, but also in the family, the workplace, and the state. In these chapters, we rely heavily on research done in the United States, but we also include material from other countries, such as Canada and Britain.

Part Three (Chapters 10–16) is a systematic guide to modern criminological theory. Theories about crime can be violently misunderstood by wrenching them from the context of the era in which they were conceived; the seven chapters in Part Three, therefore, unfold chronologically, with respect both to the contents of each chapter and to the position of each chapter in relation to the other six. We believe that all theories, including those popular today, should at first be understood historically. One virtue of this belief is the humbling discovery that our understanding of crime has advanced only very little beyond that of theorists of a century ago, such as Émile Durkheim, Adolphe Quetelet, and Karl Marx. In describing each theory, we try to show why it arose when it did, what theories it modified or supplanted, how it was understood and criticized by its competitors, and how it contributes to our understanding of crime today.

Finally, in Chapter 16 we try to show how the understanding of crime in the United States can be significantly enhanced by extending our examination to crime in other societies. We outline the key concepts and sources of data in comparative criminology and assess the merits of various cross-national generalizations about crime and crime rates.

No textbook in the social sciences has the license to assume that its contents are objective. Textbooks differ in their descriptions of theories and in the importance, or lack thereof, that they attribute to them. Textbook authors must decide which theories should be included and which ignored. This textbook suffers from similar biases, so you should be aware of our rough perception of them. The contents of Chapters 10–16 were chosen only after we wrestled with two key questions. Is a given theory a fossilized museum-piece with little theoretical relevance to our understanding of crime and criminology today? If so, it will not be found here. Does the theory contribute to the development of sociological criminology? If it does, we have tried to include it here.

We have avoided the conventional division in criminology textbooks between “crime” and “corrections” by altogether omitting the usual lengthy descriptions of the criminal justice system. Our focus in this book is not criminal justice but crime, and we have tried to discuss the complexity of the latter in

the depth we believe it warrants. Accordingly, various aspects of social control (criminalization, labeling, police practices, comparative penal policies, and so on) naturally press their claims for attention, and we explore them here especially when they affect the links between crime and structured social inequality.

Chapter Previews and Chapter Reviews

Each chapter begins with a **chapter preview** of the main themes that follow. Included in the preview is a list of **key terms** that you should be especially aware of as you read through the chapter. These terms are highlighted in the text and then immediately followed by a definition to help you understand them more easily. At the end of each chapter, a **chapter review** outlines the major points that have been discussed.

Questions for Class Discussion and Recommended Readings

Each chapter review is followed by several **questions for classroom discussion**. These are followed by an annotated list of **recommended readings** that will be helpful for essays or term papers.

References and Glossary

After the main text, there is a comprehensive, alphabetical list of **references** cited in the book. In the body of the text, you will find the references cited in the following way: (Smith, 1989:21). This example begins with the last name of the author ("Smith"), then gives the year the material was published or written ("1989"), and ends with the page number of the citation ("21"). We also make extensive use of "*ibid.*" when we refer to the same work cited in the immediately preceding citation. In the **glossary** students will find brief definitions of all of the key terms used in the book.

A Note on Chauvinist Language

In writing this textbook, we have been especially sensitive to chauvinist language, which creates the impression that one particular group—gender, race, country, species, and so on—is superior to another. For example, we do not use "he," "his," or "him" when referring to people in general, because these terms effectively exclude women. Similarly, we do not refer to the United States as "America," because the latter term should properly be reserved to signify the entire Western hemisphere—North, Central, and South America.

Acknowledgments

A book such as this inevitably incurs many debts. First and foremost, we thank our students, many of whom forced us to clarify our ideas and who provided

us with critical (at times, very critical!) comments during our classroom presentations of the material in the book. We especially want to thank Michele I. Hartford, Kathleen Shibles, and Debbie Beal.

Several of our colleagues at the University of Southern Maine have been generous with their time, but we are especially indebted to Barbara Perry. Thanks, too, to Jill Kendall and Rosy Miller, without whose help, in a great variety of ways, this book would never have been completed so smoothly. The University of Southern Maine's College of Arts and Sciences has also been very generous with the two indispensable commodities of time and financial assistance.

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PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

What Is Crime?

CHAPTER 2

The Measurement of Crime

CHAPTER 3

Inequality, Crime, and Victimization

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