

CRIME & CRIMINOLOGY



Jay Livingston

Crime and Criminology

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Preface

ANOTHER CRIMINOLOGY TEXT?

“So why don’t you write one?”

Some colleagues and I were sitting around a hotel room in Baltimore one evening at a sociology convention. I was running through my usual list of complaints about criminology textbooks, for several years of teaching the subject had sharpened my ability to point out what was wrong in these books. I had assigned one or two that I thought dealt with the subject in a serious way, presenting research findings as they related to each topic. But my students had consistently found these books frustratingly dull and inconclusive. I had to admit, the writing often sounded like a social science “review of literature”—e.g., “Schav (1977) found this, but Kugel and Cholent (1981) found that, while Knaidlach (1982) using a different measure found something else.” I also have looked at books that might have appealed to the students but which I rejected as oversimplifying complicated issues. Too many of them gave scant attention to some central but difficult issues like race and social class. Books that did devote more than two pages to these topics tended to be ideologically one-sided and tendentious. What was a teacher to do?

Some of the others in the room added their own complaints about textbooks in the courses they taught. But someone finally asked me: “So why don’t *you* write one?” The question wasn’t meant as a challenge but rather as a suggestion, even as encouragement.

Several years later, you are now holding the results. During those years, I learned something about crime and criminology and about writing textbooks. I have also changed in my sympathy and respect for the authors of other textbooks. Every book, certainly this one, has its flaws—its errors and omissions. The errors are the result of the author's own limitations and perhaps the limitations of criminology itself. The omissions are the result of the necessity of making choices, choices about what to include and what to leave out. One criminologist who read earlier drafts of this book suggested that the introduction include an explanation of hypothesis-testing and mathematical modeling. Another wanted more thorough treatment of certain sociological theories. Still another suggested cutting back the material on the criminal justice system. And there were others. Some of these suggestions I incorporated, others I did not. In these decisions, I am grateful for the advice of my editors, who said on more than one occasion, "It's *your* book."

Throughout the writing of this book, I tried to keep three main goals in mind: first, to treat the various topics seriously, trying to answer the kinds of questions that students might ask; second, to address these questions with systematic evidence from actual research; and third, to present this material in a way that kept it interesting.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

Part One. In the introductory chapter I try to make the case for evidence-based thinking about crime, for criminology differs from everyday talk about crime not so much in its ideas but in its use of evidence to test those ideas. Chapter Two asks the question, "Why is crime a problem?" and looks at crime as a political issue during the last quarter century. Chapter Three describes some of the difficulties of counting crime as well as the results of different methods of counting. It also gives some data on long-range trends in crime (mostly in the United States)—especially the puzzling decline in urban crime in the late 19th century—and it offers two competing explanations of those trends. Chapter Four presents evidence on the relation of crime to four demographic variables—age, race, sex, and social class—and tries to show why different sources of information (self-reports and arrests) give different answers.

Part Two. The first three chapters of this section examine in more detail the crimes usually known as "Index crimes" (though aggravated assault appears mostly in the category of family violence). Evidence from descriptive research—quotations from interviews with typical criminals—gives something of the flavor of ordinary street crime. The quantitative evidence should help in evaluating different explanations of these crimes. The next two chap-

ters take a similar approach to organized crime and white-collar crime, two topics where, unfortunately, criminology must usually make do with case studies rather than quantitative data.

Part Three. Criminological theory is the topic that, from the student's perspective, carries the greatest potential for drugery. I have done my best here to present the classic statements on crime in a way that makes them as vital to students as they have been to criminologists. The order of presentation for both the biological/psychological and the sociological theories is for the most part chronological. In an earlier draft, I tried to place these ideas into categories (structural/cultural/process), but too many of the theories crossed these boundaries.

Part Four. *Doing something about crime* is usually the specific province of the criminal justice system—the police, the courts, and the prisons. In each of these sections, I try to focus on the effect these institutions have on crime. Of course, some side issues were too interesting or too important to leave out. Chapter Thirteen, therefore, besides discussing the police as crime-fighters, also has some historical material on the police as well as a discussion of police misconduct. Chapter Fourteen outlines the reasons for our adversarial court systems and for some of the due-process protections (those notorious “technicalities”) that derive from the Constitution. The final three chapters are about prison, though they contain almost nothing about the internal dynamics, the sociology and psychology, of prison life. Instead, I focus on the question of how (if at all) prisons serve as an antidote to crime. To what extent and at what cost does the criminal justice system rehabilitate, deter, or incapacitate criminals?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I came by most of the ideas and information in this book in the course of years of teaching criminology. To all those people—students, colleagues, friends—who asked questions, offered ideas, or just listened as I tried to sort my thoughts; to them, though they are far too numerous to list here, I owe the largest debt of gratitude. I have also benefited from the advice of the reviewers who read earlier drafts of the manuscript: Mitchell Chamlin, University of Oklahoma; Richard J. Lundman, Ohio State University; Sarah L. Boggs, University of Missouri-St. Louis; Richard Vandiver, University of Montana; Lawrence Rosen, Temple University; and Russell Craig, Ashland University. Comments on various sections of the manuscript and discussion of specific issues came from colleagues, friends, and others in the field: Candace Clark, David Dodd, Sylvia J. Ginnot, Jennifer Hunt, Roger Lane, S. A. Livingston, Peter Reuter, Wesley Skogan, and Amy Srebnick.

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J. L.

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