MAKING TROUBLE

Cultural Constructions of Crime, Deviance, and Control

EDITORS

Jeff Ferrell • Neil Websdale

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Jeff Ferrell and Neil Websdale
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ALDINE DE GRUYTER

New York

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"There is no escape from the politics of representation"

Stuart Hall

To Karen: "Twenty thousand roads . . ."

JF

To Amy and the continuing tangle of matter and ghost.

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MAKING TROUBLE

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Preface and Acknowledgments

Making Trouble reflects some interesting developments in criminology and related fields. Over the past decade or so, more and more scholars in criminology, sociology, and criminal justice have taken as their subject of study not simply the domains of crime, deviance, and social control, but instead the complex, mediated dynamics that construct the meaning of these domains. As this subtle but significant shift in subject matter has continued, a second analytic shift has also emerged: media and cultural analysis has begun to seep into the core concepts and practices of these disciplines. Thus, *Making Trouble* developed out of our work as program committee members for the 1997 meetings of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, put in charge of organizing a series of sessions on "Media, Culture, and Crime." The enthusiastic response to these sessions, and to our broader invitation for submissions of research in this area, produced the fine works collected in *Making Trouble.*

We are especially pleased that these works confront critical issues in the cultural construction of crime, deviance, and control. By intention, the works that we have incorporated here address the mythic and often misleading manufacture of public images; the pervasive and differential construction of meaning along lines of gender, ethnicity, and age; the migration of imagery and meaning across real and imagined borders; the contested emergence of alternative or illicit media; and the parallel evolution of new forms of social and legal control. It is our hope that taken collectively, then, these works begin to expose the complex cultural processes and mediated politics involved in "making trouble."

Portions of Chapter 1, "Materials for Making Trouble," were adapted from Jeff Ferrell, "Cultural Criminology," *Annual Review of Sociology,* Vol. 25, 1999. We thank Annual Reviews.

In bringing this project to completion, we thank especially Chris Schubert, for her remarkable collegiality and consistently professional assistance; Joel Best, editor of Aldine de Gruyter's highly regarded Social Problems and Social Issues series; and Richard Koffler, executive editor, and the staff at Aldine de Gruyter.

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Materials for Making Trouble

JEFF FERRELL and NEIL WEBSDALE

INTRODUCTION

Making Trouble develops and expands an intellectual endeavor that can be denoted by the shorthand term "cultural criminology"—shorthand for a mode of analysis that embodies sensitivities to image, meaning, and representation in the study of deviance, crime, and control. This notion of "cultural criminology" references both specific perspectives and broader orientations that have emerged in criminology, sociology, and criminal justice over the past few years, and that inform this collection. Most specifically, "cultural criminology" represents a perspective developed by Ferrell (1995c) and Ferrell and Sanders (1995), and likewise employed by Redhead (1995) and others (Kane 1998a), which explores the convergence of cultural and criminal processes in contemporary social life. More broadly, cultural criminology references the increasing analytic attention that many criminologists now give to popular culture constructions, and especially mass media constructions, of crime and crime control. It in turn highlights the emergence of this general area of media and cultural inquiry as a relatively distinct domain within criminology, as evidenced, for example, by the number of recently published collections undertaking explorations of media, culture, and crime (Anderson and Howard 1998; Bailey and Hale 1998; Barak 1994; Ferrell and Sanders 1995; Kidd-Hewitt and Osborne 1995; Potter and Kappeler 1998). Most broadly, the existence of a concept such as "cultural criminology" underscores the steady seepage in recent years of cultural and media analysis into the traditional domains of criminological inquiry, such that criminologists increasingly utilize this style of analysis to explore any number of conventional criminological subjects. As this collection shows, these range across the substantive domain of criminology, from drug use, interpersonal violence, and terrorism to policing, delinquency, and predatory crime.

HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMES

At its most basic, the sort of cultural criminology utilized in *Making Trouble* attempts to integrate the fields of criminology and cultural studies or, put differently, to import the insights of cultural studies into contemporary criminology. Given this, much contemporary scholarship in cultural criminology takes as its foundation perspectives that emerged out of the British/Birmingham school of cultural studies and the British "new criminology" (Taylor, Walton, and Young 1973) of the 1970s. The work of Hebdige (1979, 1988), Hall and Jefferson (1976), Clarke (1976), McRobbie (1980), Willis (1977, 1990), and others has attuned cultural criminologists to the subtle, situated dynamics of deviant and criminal subcultures, and to the importance of symbolism and style in shaping internal and external constructions of subcultural meaning and identity. Similarly, the work of Cohen ([1972] 1980), Cohen and Young (1973), Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, and Roberts (1978), and others has influenced contemporary understandings of the mass media's role in constructing the reality of crime and deviance, and in generating new forms of social and legal control.

As a hybrid orientation, though, cultural criminology builds from more than a simple integration of 1970s British cultural studies into contemporary American criminology. Certainly, cultural criminologists continue to draw on the insights of contemporary cultural studies as a developing field, and on current cultural studies explorations of identity, sexuality, and social space (for example, During 1993; Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler 1992). Moreover, with its focus on representation, image, and style, cultural criminology incorporates not only the insights of cultural studies, but the intellectual reorientation afforded by postmodernism. In place of the modernist duality of form and content and the modernist hierarchy, which proposes that form must be stripped away to get at the meaningful core of content, cultural criminology operates from the postmodern proposition that form is content, that style is substance, that meaning thus resides in presentation and re-presentation. From this view, the study of crime necessitates not simply the examination of individual criminals and criminal events, not even the straightforward examination of media "coverage" of criminals and criminal events, but rather a journey into the spectacle and carnival of crime, a walk down an infinite hall of mirrors where images created and consumed by criminals, criminal subcultures, control agents, media institutions, and audiences bounce endlessly one off the other. In this collection and elsewhere, then, cultural criminologists explore the "networks . . . of connections, contact, contiguity, feedback and generalized interface" (Baudrillard 1985:127) out of which crime and crime control are constructed, the intertextual "media loops" (Manning 1998) through which these constructions circulate, and the discursive interconnections that emerge between

media institutions, crime control agents, and criminal subcultures (Kane 1998b). As part of this exploration, they in turn investigate criminal and deviant subcultures as sites of criminalization, criminal activity, and legal control, but also as "subaltern counterpublic[s] . . . where members . . . invent and circulate counterdiscourses [and] expand discursive space" (Fraser 1995:291).

Grounded as it is in the frameworks of cultural studies and postmodernism, cultural criminology is at the same time firmly rooted in sociological perspectives. Perhaps because of its emergence out of sociological criminology, though, cultural criminology has to this point drawn less on the sociology of culture than it has on other sociological orientations more closely aligned, historically, with criminology. Central among these is the interactionist tradition in the sociology of deviance and in criminology (for example, Becker 1963). In examining the mediated networks and discursive connections noted above, cultural criminologists also trace the manifold interactions through which criminals, control agents, media producers, and others collectively construct the meaning of crime. In so doing, cultural criminologists attempt to elaborate on the "symbolic" in "symbolic interaction" by highlighting the popular prevalence of mediated crime imagery, the interpersonal negotiation of style within criminal and deviant subcultures, and the emergence of larger symbolic universes within which crime takes on political meaning. These understandings of deviance, crime, and crime control as social and political constructions, and this endeavor to unravel the mediated processes through which these constructions occur, also build on more recent constructionist perspectives in sociology (for example, Best 1995). Yet while cultural criminology certainly draws on constructionist sociology, it also contributes to constructionist orientations. As many of the essays in this collection show, cultural criminological perspectives embody a sensitivity to mediated circuits of meaning other than those of the mass media. Further, they offer a spiraling postmodern sensibility, moving beyond the dualisms of crime event and media coverage, factual truth and distortion, which at times frame constructionist analyses, to a conception of multiple, interwoven constructions of crime, deviance, and control contested within a world of ceaseless intertextuality.

Finally, cultural criminology emerges in many ways out of critical traditions in sociology, criminology, and cultural studies, incorporating as it does a variety of critical perspectives on deviance, crime, and crime control. Utilizing these perspectives, cultural criminologists attempt to unravel the politics of crime as played out through mediated anticrime campaigns; through evocative cultural constructions of deviance, crime, and marginality; and through criminalized subcultures and their resistance to legal control. To the extent that it integrates interactionist, constructionist, and critical traditions in sociology, cultural criminology thus undertakes to de-

velop what Cohen has called "a structurally and politically informed version of labeling theory" (1988:68), or what Melossi (1985) has described as a "grounded labeling theory"—that is, an analysis that accounts for the complex circuitry of mediated interaction through which the meaning of crime and deviance is constructed, attributed, and enforced. Put more simply, cultural criminology heeds Becker's classic injunction—that we "look at all the people involved in any episode of alleged deviance . . . all the parties to a situation, and their relationships" (1963:183, 199)—and includes in this collective examination those cultural relationships, those webs of contested meaning and perception, in which all parties are entangled.

In its mix of historical and theoretical foundations, cultural criminology can thus be seen to incorporate both more traditional sociological perspectives and more recently ascendant cultural studies and postmodern approaches. As such, cultural criminology likewise embodies the creative tension in which sociology and cultural studies/postmodernism often exist (for example, Becker and McCall 1990; Denzin 1992), a tension that at its best produces attentiveness to structures of power and nuances of meaning, to fixed symbolic universes and emergent codes of marginality, to the mediated expansion of legal control and the stylized undermining of legal authority—and to the inevitable confounding of these very categories in the everyday practice of deviance, crime, and control.

CONTEMPORARY AREAS OF INQUIRY

Framed by these historical and theoretical orientations, cultural criminological research and analysis, as utilized in *Making Trouble* and elsewhere, today operates within a number of overlapping areas. The first of these can be characterized by the notion of "crime and deviance as culture." A second broad area incorporates the variety of ways in which media dynamics construct the reality of deviance, crime, and crime control. A third explores the social politics of "making trouble" and the intellectual politics of cultural criminology. Finally, a fourth emerging area incorporates those substantive and analytic innovations that the essays collected in *Making Trouble* contribute to the development of cultural criminology.

Crime and Deviance as Culture

To speak of crime and deviance as culture is to acknowledge at a minimum that much of what we label criminal or deviant behavior is at the same time cultural and subcultural behavior, collectively organized around networks of symbol, ritual, and shared meaning. While this general insight is