

# CONTENTS

VOLUME 9 • ISSUE 4 • NOVEMBER 2010

## **VIOLENT VICTIMIZATION AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS**

- EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION. Economic Conditions and Minority Violence: ..... 659  
An introduction to “Violent Victimization among Males and  
Economic Conditions: The Vulnerability of Race and Ethnic Minorities”  
**Alfred Blumstein**
- RESEARCH ARTICLE. Violent victimization among males and economic conditions: ..... 665  
The vulnerability of race and ethnic minorities  
**Janet L. Lauritsen and Karen Heimer**
- POLICY ESSAY. Property crime—yes; violence—no: ..... 693  
Comment on Lauritsen and Heimer  
**Philip J. Cook**
- POLICY ESSAY. Questions about the relationship of economic ..... 699  
conditions to violent victimization  
**Kenneth C. Land and Hui Zheng**
- POLICY ESSAY. Economic conditions and racial/ethnic variations ..... 707  
in violence: Immigration, the Latino paradox, and future research  
**Ramiro Martinez, Jr.**
- POLICY ESSAY. Inequality by design: The connection between race, ..... 715  
crime, victimization, and social policy.  
**Patricia Y. Warren**

## **PUBLIC CRIMINOLOGIES**

- EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION. Editorial Introduction to “Public Criminologies” ..... 721  
**Todd R. Clear**
- RESEARCH ARTICLE. Public Criminologies ..... 725  
**Christopher Uggen and Michelle Inderbitzin**
- POLICY ESSAY. Comment on “Public criminologies” ..... 751  
**Paul Rock**
- POLICY ESSAY. Who will be the public criminologists? ..... 769  
How will they be supported?  
**Kenneth C. Land**

POLICY ESSAY. What is to be done with public criminology? .....771  
**Ian Loader and Richard Sparks**

POLICY ESSAY. “Public criminology” and evidence-based policy .....783  
**Michael Tonry**

POLICY ESSAY. The role of research and researchers in crime and justice policy .....799  
**Daniel P. Mears**

## **REDUCING HOMELESS-RELATED CRIME**

---

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION. The Police, Disorder, and the Homeless .....807  
**Anthony A. Braga**

RESEARCH ARTICLE. Policing the homeless: An evaluation of efforts to .....813  
 reduce homeless-related crime  
**Richard Berk and John MacDonald**

POLICY ESSAY. Policy Essay on “Policing the Homeless...” .....841  
**Alex R. Piquero**

POLICY ESSAY. Tackling homelessness in Los Angeles’ Skid Row: .....851  
 The role of policing strategies and the spatial deconcentration of homelessness  
**Dennis P. Culhane**

POLICY ESSAY. Policy is in the details: Using external validity to help policy makers .....859  
**John E. Eck**

POLICY ESSAY. The Safer Cities Initiative and the removal of the homeless: .....867  
 Reducing crime or promoting gentrification on Los Angeles’ Skid Row?  
**Alex S. Vitale**

POLICY ESSAY. Policy essay on “Policing the Homeless: An Evaluation .....875  
 of Efforts to Reduce Homeless-Related Crime”  
**Michael Rowe and Maria O’Connell**

POLICY ESSAY. Jim Longstreet, Mike Marshall, and the lost art .....883  
 of policing skid row  
**Michael D. White**

# Guide to Preparing Manuscripts

**Editorial Policy**—*Criminology & Public Policy* (CPP) is a peer-reviewed journal devoted to the study of criminal justice policy and practice. The central objective of the journal is to strengthen the role of research findings in the formulation of crime and justice policy by publishing empirically based, policy-focused articles. Authors are encouraged to submit papers that contribute to a more informed dialogue about policies and their empirical bases. Papers suitable for CPP not only present their findings, but also explore the policy-relevant implications of those findings. Specifically, appropriate papers for CPP do one or more of the following:

- Strengthen the role of research in the development of criminal justice policy and practice
- Empirically assess criminal justice policy or practice, and provide evidence-based support for new, modified, or alternative policies and practices
- Provide more informed dialogue about criminal justice policies and practices and the empirical evidence related to these policies and practices
- Advance the relationship between criminological research and criminal justice policy and practice

The policy focus of the journal requires articles with a slightly different emphasis than is found in most peer-reviewed academic journals. Most academic journals look for papers that have comprehensive literature reviews, provide detailed descriptions of methodology, and draw implications for future research. In contrast, CPP seeks papers that offer literature reviews more targeted to the problem at hand, provide efficient data descriptions, and include a more lengthy discussion of the implications for policy and practice. The preferred paper describes the policy or practice at issue, the significance of the problem being investigated, and the associated policy implications. This introduction is followed by a description and critique of pertinent previous research specific to the question at hand. The methodology is described briefly, referring the reader to other sources if available. The presentation of the results includes only those tables and graphs necessary to make central points (additional descriptive statistics and equations are provided in appendices). The paper concludes with a full discussion of how the study either provides or fails to provide empirical support for current, modified, or new policies or practices. The journal is interdisciplinary, devoted to the study of crime, deviant behavior, and related phenomena, as found in the social and behavioral sciences and in the fields of law, criminal justice, and history. The major emphases are theory, research, historical issues, policy evaluation, and current controversies concerning crime, law, and justice.

**Manuscript Submissions**—Manuscripts are to be submitted electronically to [cpp@fsu.edu](mailto:cpp@fsu.edu). The manuscript should be submitted in one Word (.doc) file with tables and figures in the same document as the manuscript text. Please note that Word 2007 is not yet compatible with journal production systems. Unfortunately, the journal cannot accept Microsoft Word 2007 documents until such time as a stable production version is released. Please use Word's "Save As" option, therefore, to save your document as an older (.doc) file type. Additional documents, including cover letters or memos to the editor, may also be e-mailed as supplemental files. Although we strongly encourage on-line submission, those who prefer not to submit on-line may send a CD to Julie Mestre, Managing Editor, Florida State University, Center for Criminology & Public Policy Research, 325 John Knox Road Building L-102, Tallahassee, FL 32303.

A two-section abstract of approximately 150 words (see example on page 6 of the Style Sheet) and a brief biographical paragraph describing each author's current affiliation, research interests, and recent publications should accompany the manuscript. A \$10 submission fee, made payable to the American Society of Criminology, is also required (except for student sole authors). This may be submitted as a check mailed to the address above, or credit card payments can be arranged.

Papers accepted for publication should comply with American Psychological Association guidelines concerning nonsexist language. We accept three formats for digital artwork submission: Encapsulated PostScript (EPS), Portable Document Format (PDF), and Tagged Image Format (TIFF). We suggest that line art be saved as EPS files. Alternately, these may be saved as PDF files at 600 dots per inch (dpi) or better at final size. Tone art, or photographic images, should be saved as TIFF files with a resolution of 300 dpi at final size. For combination figures, or artwork that contains both photographs and labeling, we recommend saving figures as EPS files, or as PDF files with a resolution of 600 dpi or better at final size. More detailed information on the submission of electronic artwork can be found at:

<http://authorservices.wiley.com/bauthor/illustration.asp>

The American Society of Criminology regards submission of a manuscript to this journal as a commitment to publish herein; simultaneous submission to another journal is unacceptable. Every effort will be made to notify authors of editorial decisions within 3 months of manuscript and processing fee receipt. Note that CPP publication decisions arrive by postal mail, so please indicate whether you prefer e-mail correspondence to postal mail upon submission of your manuscript.

Please consult and conform to the CPP Style Sheet, which is available at [cpp.fsu.edu](http://cpp.fsu.edu), prior to submission.

*Criminology & Public Policy* (Print ISSN #1538-6473/On-line ISSN #1745-9133) is published quarterly on behalf of the American Society of Criminology, 1314 Kinnear Road, Suite 212, Columbus, OH 43212 by Wiley Subscription Services, Inc., a Wiley Company, 111 River St., Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774.

**Information for subscribers.** *Criminology & Public Policy* is published in four issues per year. Institutional print and on-line subscription prices for 2010 are: US\$263 (U.S.), US\$329 (rest of world), €210 (Europe), £168 (U.K.). Prices are exclusive of tax. Asia-Pacific GST, Canadian GST, and European VAT will be applied at the appropriate rates. For more information on current tax rates, please visit [www3.interscience.wiley.com/aboutus/journal\\_ordering\\_and\\_payment.html#Tax](http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/aboutus/journal_ordering_and_payment.html#Tax). The price includes on-line access to the current and all on-line back issues to January 1, 1997 (where available). For other pricing options, including access information and terms and conditions, please visit [www.interscience.wiley.com/journal-info](http://www.interscience.wiley.com/journal-info). A subscription to *Criminology & Public Policy* also includes 4 issues of *Criminology*.

**Delivery terms and legal title.** Prices include delivery of print journals to the recipient's address. Delivery terms are Delivered Duty Unpaid (DDU); the recipient is responsible for paying any import duty or taxes. Legal title passes to the customer on despatch by our distributors.

**Journal customer service.** For ordering information, claims, and any inquiry concerning your journal subscription, please visit [www.interscience.wiley.com/support](http://www.interscience.wiley.com/support) or contact your nearest office. *Americas* e-mail: [cs-journals@wiley.com](mailto:cs-journals@wiley.com); telephone: +1 781 388 8598 or +1 800 835 6770 (toll free inside the U.S. and Canada). *Europe, Middle East, and Africa* e-mail: [cs-journals@wiley.com](mailto:cs-journals@wiley.com); telephone: +44 (0) 1865 778315. *Asia Pacific* e-mail: [cs-journals@wiley.com](mailto:cs-journals@wiley.com); telephone: +65 6511 8000. *Japan* For Japanese speaking support, email: [cs-japan@wiley.com](mailto:cs-japan@wiley.com); telephone: +65 6511 8010 or telephone (toll free): 005 316 50 480. **Visit our Online Customer Self-Help** available in 6 languages at [www.interscience.wiley.com/support](http://www.interscience.wiley.com/support).

**Membership.** American Society of Criminology membership is available to all interested people. Individuals interested in joining should complete and return the application forms on the American Society of Criminology Web site ([www.asc41.com](http://www.asc41.com)). Membership in the American Society of Criminology includes a subscription to *Criminology* and *Criminology & Public Policy*.

**Back issues.** Information about the availability and prices of back issues can be obtained from the American Society of Criminology by e-mail ([asc@asc41.com](mailto:asc@asc41.com)) or telephone (614-292-9207).

**Mailing and on-line access.** Journal Customer Service, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 350 Main St., Malden, MA 02148-5020. Postmaster: Send all address changes to *Criminology & Public Policy*. This journal is available on-line at Wiley InterScience. Visit [www.interscience.wiley.com](http://www.interscience.wiley.com) to search the articles and register for Table of Contents e-mail alerts.

Access to this journal is available free online within institutions in the developing world through the AGORA initiative with the FAO, the HINARI initiative with the WHO and the OARE initiative with UNEP. For information, visit [www.aginternetwork.org](http://www.aginternetwork.org), [www.healthinternetwork.org](http://www.healthinternetwork.org), and [www.oarescience.org](http://www.oarescience.org).

**Wiley contacts.** Bi Xian Tan, Production Editor (e-mail: [bxtan@wiley.com](mailto:bxtan@wiley.com)); Kristin McCarthy, Advertising (e-mail: [kmccarthy@wiley.com](mailto:kmccarthy@wiley.com)).

**Wiley's Corporate Citizenship** initiative seeks to address the environmental, social, economic, and ethical challenges faced in our business and which are important to our diverse stakeholder groups. We have made a long-term commitment to standardize and improve our efforts around the world to reduce our carbon footprint. Follow our progress at [www.wiley.com/go/citizenship](http://www.wiley.com/go/citizenship).

**Copyright © of The American Society of Criminology.** All rights reserved. No portion of the contents of *Criminology & Public Policy* may be reproduced without the permission of the American Society of Criminology. Please forward all rights and permission requests to the American Society of Criminology, 1314 Kinnear Road, Suite 212, Columbus, OH 43212.

# THANKS TO OUR REVIEWERS

---

*Criminology & Public Policy* (CPP) relies on the expertise and judgment of our blind peer reviewers in identifying manuscripts for publication. We would like to take this opportunity to extend our sincere appreciation to our colleagues for their contributions that have assisted us in producing our third volume of CPP. Each of the reviewers listed below returned at least one review during the period June 2009 to May 2010.

—Tom Blomberg

Tage Alalehto, Umeå University  
Jay Albanese, Virginia Commonwealth University  
Amy Anderson, University of Nebraska, Omaha  
M. Douglas Anglin, University of California, Los Angeles  
Joyce Arditti, Virginia Tech University  
Ashley Arnio, Florida State University  
James Austin, JFA Institute  
Bill Bales, Florida State University  
Gregg Barak, Eastern Michigan University  
Stephen Baron, Queen's University  
Jayne Barnard, William and Mary Law School  
Eric Baumer, Florida State University  
David Bayley, Albany University  
Sarah Bennett, University of Queensland  
Richard Berk, University of Pennsylvania  
Emily Blake, Keynes College, University of Kent  
Anthony Bleetman, Birmingham Heartlands Hospital  
Richard Block, Loyola University  
Jeff Boer, University of Waikato  
Jeff Bouffard, Sam Houston State University  
Anthony Braga, Harvard University  
John Braithwaite, Australian National University  
Robert Brame, University of North Carolina, Charlotte  
Rod Brunson, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale  
Bruce Bullington, Florida State University  
Karen Bullock, Surrey University  
George Burruss, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale  
Shawn Bushway, University at Albany  
Jim Byrne, University of Massachusetts, Lowell  
Andrew Carswell, University of Georgia  
Allison Chappell, Old Dominion University  
Jim Clark, Florida State University  
Todd Clear, John Jay College  
Jennifer Cobbina, Michigan State University  
Helen Codd, Lancashire Law School  
Caran Colvin, San Francisco State University  
Terry Coonan, Florida State University  
Heith Copes, University of Alabama, Birmingham  
Sarah Craun, University of Tennessee

Victoria Crittenden, Boston College  
Hazel Croall, Glasgow Caledonian University  
Elliott Currie, University of California, Irvine  
Fiona David, Australian Institute of Criminology  
Scott Decker, Arizona State University  
Matt DeLisi, Iowa State University  
Mary Dodge, University of Colorado, Denver  
Bill Doerner, Florida State University  
John Donohue, Yale Law School  
Grant Duwe, Minnesota Department of Corrections  
David Eitle, Montana State University  
Malcolm Feeley, University of California, Berkeley  
Barry Feld, University of Minnesota Law School  
Richard Felson, Pennsylvania State University  
Chuck Frazier, University of Florida  
James Freeman, Queensland University of Technology  
David Friedrichs, University of Scranton  
Gerry Gaes, Florida State University  
Joel Garner, Joint Centers for Justice Studies, Inc.  
Gil Geis, University of California, Irvine  
Marc Gertz, Florida State University  
Colin Goff, University of Winnipeg  
Denise Gottfredson, University of Maryland  
Penny Green, King's College London  
Stuart Green, Rutgers School of Law  
David Greenberg, New York University  
Phil Hadfield, University of Leeds  
Theodore Hammett, Abt Associates  
Leigh Harkins, University of Birmingham  
John Hasseldine, Nottingham University  
Carter Hay, Florida State University  
Martha Henderson Hurley, Citadel  
John Hepburn, Arizona State University  
David Hess, University of Michigan  
David Hirschel, University of Massachusetts, Lowell  
Kristy Holtfreter, Arizona State University  
Julie Horney, Pennsylvania State University  
Frank Horvath, Michigan State University  
Beth Huebner, University of Missouri, St. Louis

Lorine Hughes, University of Nebraska, Omaha  
 Alastair Iles, University of California, Berkeley  
 Bruce Jacobs, University of Texas, Dallas  
 Yvonne Jewks, University of Leicester  
 Peter Jones, Temple University  
 Suman Kakar, Florida International University  
 Victor Kappeler, Eastern Kentucky University  
 Andrew Karmen, John Jay College  
 Susanne Karstedt, Keele University  
 Charles Katz, Arizona State University  
 Kimberly Kempf-Leonard, University of Southern Illinois,  
 Carbondale  
 David Kennedy, John Jay College  
 Ryan King, SUNY, Albany  
 Gary Kleck, Florida State University  
 Malcolm Klein, University of Southern California  
 Lars Korsell, Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention  
 Tomislav Kovandzic, University of Texas, Dallas  
 Marv Krohn, University of Florida  
 Gary LaFree, University of Maryland  
 Ken Land, Duke University  
 Ed Latessa, University of Cincinnati  
 Daniel LeClair, Boston University  
 Mike Leiber, Virginia Commonwealth University  
 Paul Leighton, Eastern Michigan University  
 Jill Levenson, Lynn University  
 Michael Levi, Cardiff University  
 Shelley Listwan, Kent State University  
 Wayne Logan, Florida State University  
 Karol Lucken, University of Central Florida  
 James Lynch, John Jay College of Criminal Justice  
 Peter Marni, John Jay College of Criminal Justice  
 Christina Mancini, Florida Atlantic University  
 Jorge Martinez-Vazquez, Georgia State University  
 Cheryl Maxson, University of California, Irvine  
 Paul Mazerolle, Griffith University  
 Sean McConville, Queen Mary University of London  
 Jude McCulloch, Monash University  
 Marie McKendall, Grand Valley State University  
 Dan Mears, Florida State University  
 Ryan Meldrum, Florida International University  
 Gary Melton, Clemson University  
 Terance Miethe, University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
 John Minkes, Swansea University  
 Carl Moody, College of William and Mary  
 Kathryn Morgan, University of Alabama, Birmingham  
 Laura Moriarty, Virginia Commonwealth University  
 Ann Mumford, Queen Mary University of London  
 Elizabeth Mustaine, University of Central Florida  
 Dan Nagin, Carnegie Mellon University

Graeme Newman, University at Albany  
 Mark Olver, University of Saskatchewan  
 Nicky Padfield, Cambridge University  
 Rick Parent, Simon Fraser University  
 Ray Paternoster, University of Maryland  
 Joan Petersilia, Stanford Law School  
 Dana Peterson, University at Albany  
 Alex Piquero, Florida State University  
 Nicky Piquero, Florida State University  
 Greg Pogarsky, SUNY, Albany  
 William Ponicki, Prevention Research Institute  
 Michael Prendergast, University of California, Los Angeles  
 Tim Prenzler, Griffith University  
 Steven Raphael, University of California, Berkeley  
 D. Michael Risinger, Seton Hall University  
 Richard Rosenfeld, University of Missouri, St. Louis  
 Dawn Rothe, Old Dominion University  
 David Rottman, National Center for State Courts  
 William Sabol, Bureau of Justice Statistics  
 Lisa Sample, University of Nebraska, Omaha  
 Joachim Savelsberg, University of Minnesota  
 Michael Scott, University of Wisconsin, Madison  
 Jennifer Shaffer, Arizona State University  
 Susan Shapiro, American Bar Foundation  
 Clete Snell, University of Houston, Downtown  
 Laureen Snider, Queen's University  
 Cassia Spohn, Arizona State University  
 Benjamin Steiner, University of South Carolina  
 Eric Stewart, Florida State University  
 Jared Strote, University of Washington  
 Brian Stults, Florida State University  
 Faye Taxman, George Mason University  
 Richard Tewksbury, University of Louisville  
 Robert Tillman, St. John's University  
 Terance Thornberry, University of Maryland  
 Steve Tombs, Liverpool John Moores University  
 James Unnever, University of South Florida, Sarasota  
 Bert Useem, Purdue University  
 Christy Visher, University of Delaware  
 David Weisburd, George Mason University  
 Deborah Weisel, North Carolina State University  
 Wayne Welsh, Temple University  
 Michael White, Arizona State University  
 David Whyte, University of Liverpool  
 John Wooldredge, University of Cincinnati  
 Richard Wright, University of Missouri, St. Louis  
 Peter Yeager, Boston University  
 Kristen Zgoba, New Jersey Department of Corrections  
 Franklin Zimring, University of California, Berkeley

# EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

---

## VIOLENT VICTIMIZATION AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

### Economic Conditions and Minority Violence

#### An introduction to “Violent Victimization among Males and Economic Conditions: The Vulnerability of Race and Ethnic Minorities”

**Alfred Blumstein**, *Senior Editor*

*Heinz College, Carnegie Mellon University*

The problems from what has been called the “Great Recession” (2007–2010), which was marked by the stock market crash of September 2008, understandably have raised many questions and concerns about how the economic impact of those problems will affect crime. Indeed, many have been prepared for the worst, especially in terms of its impact on African American and Hispanic communities because of a presumed disproportionate impact on their job opportunities and the consequent reactions in terms of need for money and resulting family tension and frustrations. All of these elements could be causal factors in terms of property crime as a replacement for employment and violence as an outgrowth of conflict. Lauritsen and Heimer (2010, this issue) have made the following important contributions to addressing these issues:

- They have focused on the issue of violence, leaving the issue of property crime to others.
- They have invoked the richer detail of the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) rather than the limited detail associated with the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR), presuming that the violent victimization of members of a racial or ethnic group is perpetrated most often by other members of that group.
- They have related the violent victimization time series to one indicator of economic conditions, the Consumer Pessimism Index (CPI), the obverse of the Consumer Sentiment Index, which was introduced to criminology by Rosenfeld and Fornango (2007), rather than the more common conventional economic indexes like unemployment rates or employment rates.

---

Direct correspondence to Alfred Blumstein, Heinz College, Carnegie Mellon University, 5000 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15213 (e-mail: ab0q@andrew.cmu.edu).

- They have focused on African Americans and Hispanics, which are the nation's largest minority groups that disproportionately suffer the disadvantages most often associated with crime and are the most vulnerable to the impacts of economic shocks.

These choices highlight the complexity of measuring the causal effects on “crime” of any societal phenomenon:

- What kinds of crime should be measured?
- Through what lens should it be measured?
- How will the effects differ across different demographic groups (age, race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, residence, and many others)?
- What are appropriate—and empirically accessible—measures of the societal phenomenon we are concerned about?
- How can we get a forecast of the societal phenomenon that is any better than the inherently weak forecasts we have about crime itself?

Given the multidimensionality of these choices, it is no wonder that the state of knowledge in criminology has moved as slowly as it has. Any single author or research team is forced to make discrete choices in each of these domains. Then, when asked to prescribe appropriate policies, authors are driven to choices that they prefer ideologically or have been shown to be useful in other contexts and hopefully will be transferable. If one focuses on a policy that is distinctively appropriate to one of the analytic choices, how well does that transfer to a different analytic choice, and how does that fit in the larger societal context?

In the context of trying to understand the impact of economic conditions on violent crime among African American and Hispanic males, which was a concern that was certainly raised early in the development of what became the Great Recession, Lauritsen and Heimer (2010) had to make some additional hard choices, as follows:

- Among Hispanics, how to differentiate among citizens (native born or naturalized) or immigrants, documented or undocumented.
- Whether to try to differentiate among the economic sectors that would be experiencing an economic shock—the dot-com bust of the early 2000s compared with the housing and construction bust resulting from the finance catastrophes of the late 2000s.
- In terms of policy, all the political attention during a recession is focused on the economy and creating and stimulating the creation of jobs generally, how does one attract some attention to the particular kinds of jobs that are most likely to have an impact on crime, and especially crime by or against minority groups?

One particular challenge they faced was how to bring into the policy arena the results that are interesting and important from the perspective of criminology: Their disaggregation of serious violent victimization by race and ethnicity was interesting and important, and finding a linkage of some sort to economic conditions made it even more interesting. The natural policy implication of these observed relationships is to put more resources into the kinds of social services targeted at the disadvantaged minority populations that are most seriously impacted



by the economic downturns and are most likely to turn to crime as a result. But, of course, the revenues of state and local government agencies that provide these services are also impacted seriously by the economic downturn, and those services tend to be cut back despite the cries of criminologists noting their importance in preventing crime. Those cries are likely to be heeded only if a dramatic shift upward in crime rates occurs. Even then, the response is far less likely to be an increase in the social services and much more in the form of greater enforcement and incarceration to demonstrate responsiveness to the public concerns rather than to accept the lags between the provision of the social services and their later impact on crime reduction.

The irony of this situation is reflected in the interaction between the economic trauma of the Great Recession and crime rates. One would not expect to observe much street crime generated by the financial analysts or traders laid off by Lehman Brothers, or even by the large numbers of workers in their 50s who were laid off and are not likely to be reemployed. One would also not expect to observe much change in the rates of violence by Elijah Anderson's (1999) "street people," who are largely out of tune to both the ups and the downs of the economy. Rather, the people most likely to be impacted by a downturn in job opportunities are the recent high-school graduates who would otherwise have moved into the legitimate economy and now find that opportunity blocked to them, and so they have an incentive to continue to engage in the kinds of crime that they—or at least their neighborhood teenage colleagues—have been doing.

Another irony of the 2009 recession is the striking decrease in crime rates reported by the Preliminary 2009 UCR Crime Statistics, which reported a 7% decrease in homicide, 8% decrease in robbery, and 5% decrease in property crimes (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2010); these findings represent the first significant decreases since 2000, a period during which national crime rates had been impressively flat. This decline in 2009 was contrary to all expectations by criminologists, the media, and the lay public. Not only have the declines been large, but also they have been widespread, particularly among the larger cities where homicide rates decreased by 11% in the cities of 1 million or more and 500,000 to 1 million. In a group of 22 relatively high-crime cities that was examined, the decline was not only large but also impressively widespread; for homicide, 18 cities declined, and 5 cities by more than 20%, and for robbery 20 cities declined, 12 cities by more than 10% (Yost, 2010). So far, no thorough documented assessments have been published of the factors contributing to this good news, and hardly any speculation has been made. One interesting hypothesis that can be pursued once some demographics from 2009 crime and victimization rates become available is whether there has been a disproportionate decline in African American involvement in violence in response to the election of the first African American President in 2009; this issue is particularly important, not only as a policy choice but also to recognize the important degree to which factors outside the criminological tradition can have a major influence on crime rates.

The four policy essays included in this segment nicely complement the work by Lauritsen and Heimer (2010). Cook (2010, this issue) draws on his own and others' research, finding a clear link between economic conditions (unemployment rate and employment—population

ratio) and robbery and burglary rates, finding no association with criminal homicide. He also rationalizes the authors' finding of counter-cyclical effects (i.e., robbery victimization goes up when economic conditions go down) on Blacks and Hispanics by presuming most robbery to occur within minority groups, which disproportionately suffer the effect of economic downturns. His observations also suggest a parallel study of perpetrators by Lauritsen and Heimer because the victimization survey contains some identification information on the perpetrators

Land and Zheng (2010, this issue) propose several possibly useful methodological variations on those used by Lauritsen and Heimer (2010) and use the unemployment rate with some new analyses of their own to confirm the influence of the unemployment rate on victimization. The essay by Martinez (2010, this issue) invokes his extensive research on Latino immigrant groups, and his findings are consistent with those of many other investigators: Immigrant groups are less involved in crime and violence than native groups. These findings are particularly important in the contemporary political environment where anti-immigration rhetoric erroneously accuses immigrants of contributing disproportionately to crime and calls for specially targeted control measures.

Warren's (2010, this issue) policy essay focuses on the inequality of minority groups and their particular vulnerability to economic conditions. She offers some policy strategies for addressing their needs. One involves greater police presence in their communities, but only in a community-oriented policing mode, working with established community groups. She also highlights the importance of education involving school-based tutorial reading and math programs as a means of providing minority groups tools to better overcome the disadvantages inherent in their communities, to enable them to more quickly overcome other historical disadvantages impacting minorities, and to be better able to weather future economic downturns.

## References

- Anderson, Elijah. 1999. *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Cook, Philip J. 2010. Property crime—yes; violence—no: Comment on Lauritsen and Heimer. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Federal Bureau of Investigation. 2010. *Preliminary 2009 Crime Statistics*. Retrieved May 28, 2010 from [fbi.gov/ucr/prelimsem2009/index.html](http://fbi.gov/ucr/prelimsem2009/index.html).
- Land, Kenneth C. and Hui Zheng. 2010. Questions about the relationship of economic conditions to violent victimization. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Lauritsen, Janet L. and Karen Heimer. 2010. Violent victimization among males and economic conditions: The vulnerability of race and ethnic minorities. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Martinez, Ramiro, Jr. 2010. Economic conditions and racial/ethnic variations in violence: Immigration, the Latino paradox, and future research. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.

- 
- Rosenfeld, Richard and Robert Fornango. 2007. The impact of economic conditions on robbery and property crime: The role of consumer sentiment. *Criminology*, 45: 735–769.
- Warren, Patricia. 2010. Inequality by design: The connection among race, crime, victimization, and social policy. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Yost, Pete. 2010. Crime rates down for third year, despite recession. *Houston Chronicle*. May 24.
- 

**Alfred Blumstein** is the J. Erik Jonsson University Professor of Urban Systems and Operations Research and former Dean of Carnegie Mellon's Heinz School of Public Policy and Management. He has had extensive experience in both research and policy within the criminal justice system since serving as Director of Science and Technology for the President's Crime Commission (1966–1967). He was Chair of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, and he served as a member of the Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing. He was President of the American Society of Criminology (ASC) and received its Sutherland Award for research contributions. He has been honored with the 2007 Stockholm Prize in Criminology. His research has covered many aspects of criminal justice phenomena and policy, including crime trends and measurement, criminal careers, sentencing, deterrence and incapacitation, prison populations, demographic trends, juvenile violence, and drug-enforcement policy.



# RESEARCH ARTICLE

---

## VIOLENT VICTIMIZATION AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

# Violent victimization among males and economic conditions

## The vulnerability of race and ethnic minorities

**Janet L. Lauritsen**

*University of Missouri—St. Louis*

**Karen Heimer**

*University of Iowa*

### **Research Summary**

*In this article, we use data from the 1973 to 2005 National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) to estimate previously unknown trends in serious nonfatal violent victimization for Latino, non-Latino Black, and non-Latino White males in the United States. Past research has shown that Blacks and Latinos have been more susceptible than Whites to financial hardship during economic downturns and that economic disadvantage is an important correlate of violence in cross-sectional analyses. If significant declines in the national economy contribute to increases in violence, then crime trends disaggregated by race and ethnicity should show greater changes among minorities during periods of economic downturn. Although rates of violence have declined for all groups, we find that trends for Latino and Black males are similar and closely follow changes in consumer sentiment. In contrast, trends for White males display fewer fluctuations coinciding with changes in economic conditions. Continued disaggregation shows that these patterns appear primarily in stranger violence and not in violence by known offenders. The patterns also suggest*

---

This project was supported by funding from the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice (Award No. 2007-IJ-CX-0026). The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of any of the aforementioned agencies. We gratefully acknowledge the research assistance of Nicole White and Ekaterina Gorislavsky and the support services from the Public Policy Center at the University of Iowa. Direct correspondence to Janet L. Lauritsen, Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Missouri—St. Louis, St. Louis, MO, 63121 (e-mail: Janet\_Lauritsen@umsl.edu); Karen Heimer, Department of Sociology and Public Policy Center, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA, 52242 (e-mail: Karen-Heimer@uiowa.edu).

*that the association between changing economic conditions and male victimization trends might have weakened in recent years.*

### **Policy Implications**

*The findings raise concerns about the potential impact of recent economic changes on the risk for serious victimization, particularly among Blacks and Latinos. In light of the possible recent weakening of the relationship between economic changes and crime, future research should assess whether criminal justice policies and other factors moderate the relationship between economic conditions and victimization and use group-specific measures of violence so that important variability across race and ethnicity is not masked. These analyses also should be expanded to consider the potential effects on violence of government policies designed to alleviate poverty and unemployment.*

### **Keywords**

*violence, trends, victimization, race, ethnicity, economic conditions, policy, recession*

The study of crime trends is an integral component of criminological research, and it is well understood that efforts to understand and prevent violence should include the systematic description of trends in fatal and nonfatal violence and the identification of subgroups most at risk. Disaggregated trends can reveal whether increases and decreases in violent victimization over time have been experienced equally or whether some subgroups have distinct trends. These types of descriptive analyses were a critical step for understanding the nature of the youth homicide epidemic of the late 1980s and early 1990s (Blumstein and Rosenfeld, 1998; Blumstein and Wallman, 2006; Cook and Laub, 2002).

Yet researchers have not compared long-term trends in serious violent victimization for Latinos, non-Latino Blacks (hereafter Black), and non-Latino Whites (hereafter White) because of the lack of readily available data. The Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) do not record information about the victim's ethnicity, and victimization rates disaggregated beyond categories of "Black" and "White" are not obtainable from National Crime Survey (NCS) reports for years prior to 1993. More refined race and ethnic group comparisons are important because the rates of Whites are confounded with those of Latinos when ethnicity is not taken into account, and race and ethnicity have been shown to be associated with levels of violent victimization in cross-sectional research (Lauritsen and White, 2001). Not only would long-term trends by race and ethnicity provide previously unknown information about the experiences of Latinos, they also can offer valuable insight into the group-specific consequences of potential causal factors, including changing national economic conditions, the focus of the current investigation.

In this research, we estimate long-term trends in serious nonfatal violent victimization for Latino, Black, and White males in the United States.<sup>1</sup> We also show how these group-specific trends are associated with previous national economic downturns. We estimate the trends for the period 1973–2005 using data from the NCS and the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), which contain measures of race and ethnicity not available elsewhere. These data also permit increased disaggregation by incident characteristics; thus, we also estimate race and ethnic differences by victim–offender relationship and by type of crime. The former comparisons can be used to explore whether previous economic downturns have different associations with stranger versus nonstranger violence, whereas the latter can be used to assess whether the associations depend on economic motivation (i.e., robbery vs. aggravated assault). We describe the relationships between the group-specific trends in violence and economic downturns using a continuous indicator of economic change that has been shown to be related significantly to property crime trends, the Index of Consumer Sentiment (ICS; Rosenfeld, 2009; Rosenfeld and Fornango, 2007). We also note how other indicators such as unemployment, poverty, and a discrete measure of recessionary periods are associated with these trends.

The results from this research are used to discuss the need to refine our understanding of the relationship between race and ethnicity, changing economic conditions, and serious violent victimization as well as to prompt additional research on how factors such as drug markets and criminal justice policies might moderate these relationships. The findings also suggest the importance of broadening the scope of criminological policy research to include analyses of the potential effects of social-welfare programs such as income transfers, job programs, employment benefits, and family assistance. Such policies have received relatively little attention in criminological research and might have broader benefits that include dampening possible increases in serious violent victimization.

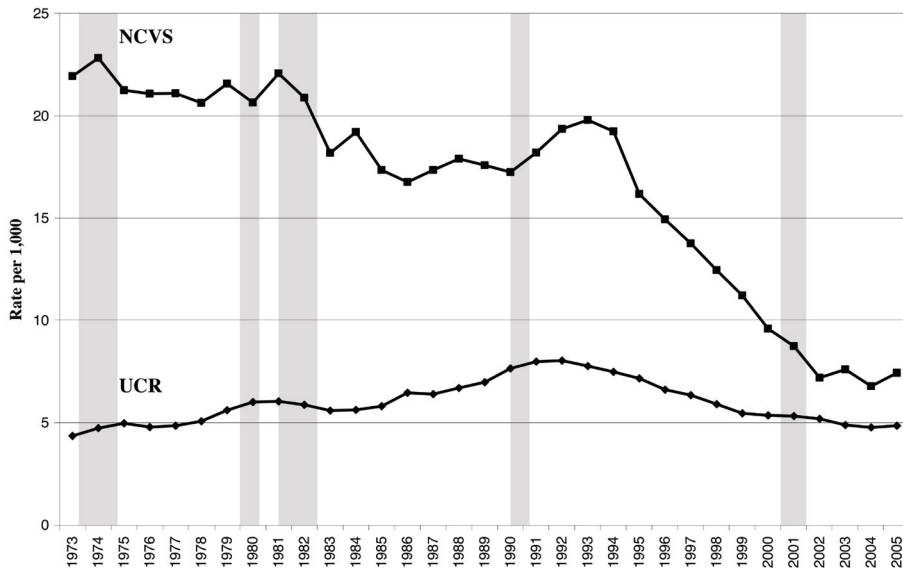
## Background

The onset of the most recent economic recession in December 2007 led to many stories in the news media about possible increases in crime and violence (e.g., Audi and Fields, 2010; Cramer, 2009; Hauser and Baker, 2008; Li, 2009). Typically, these news accounts feature statements by criminologists and others who report no relationship between past recessions and violence rates as well as some who expect to see some increases as a result of the economic downturn. One reason for the belief that the most recent recession is unlikely to result in increases in violence is that long-term aggregate trends in serious nonfatal violence using data from either the UCR or the NCVS exhibit little apparent association with periodic downturns in the national economy. For example, when UCR and NCVS trends in serious violence are displayed in conjunction

1. Of course, it is equally important to conduct similar investigations of female victimization, and such work currently is underway. We do not combine the presentation of the results for male and female victimization because of the need to pay special attention to intimate partner violence for females, which occurs at extremely low rates among males. In addition, preliminary analyses show that the overall trends and race and ethnic differences in serious nonfatal victimization differ somewhat for males and females.

FIGURE 1

**Serious Violent Crime Rates and Recession Periods:  
UCR and NCVS 1973-2005**



with information designating past recessionary periods (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2003), relatively little noteworthy change in violence seems to occur during these periods in either data series (see Figure 1).<sup>2</sup> Such patterns suggest that past recessions have not corresponded closely with aggregate serious violent crime rates over the past several decades.

However, despite the patterns in Figure 1, it is clear that many criminologists are ill at ease with the assertion that economic recessions, or other changes in economic conditions, have little relationship to crime rates. A large body of cross-sectional research consistently has demonstrated a strong relationship between economic disadvantage and violence at various levels of analysis. Studies of states, metropolitan areas (e.g., Land, McCall, and Cohen, 1990), cities (e.g., Land, McCall, and Cohen, 1991), neighborhoods (e.g., Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls, 1997), and census tracts (e.g., Krivo, Peterson, and Payne, 2009) have found effects of economic disadvantage on violence rates. In a recent meta-analysis of macrolevel predictors of crime, Pratt and Cullen (2005) reported that the effect sizes were both strong and stable across

2. The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) defines recessions as those periods in which a significant decline occurs in economic activity across a variety of indicators, including gross domestic product, income, employment, industrial production, and retail sales (NBER, 2003). Recession periods begin when significant decreases in these indicators become evident and end when significant increases resume. Since 1973, the NBER has designated the following periods as recessions: November 1973 to March 1975, January 1980 to July 1980, July 1981 to November 1982, July 1990 to March 1991, March 2001 to November 2001, and the most recent recession, which began in December 2007 (NBER, 2010).



153 studies of poverty and crime. Similarly, individual- and multi-level research has found that neighborhood economic disadvantage and family income have independent effects on an individual's risk for violent victimization (Lauritsen, 2001) and that neighborhood disadvantage and subjective financial strain in the household are related to women's risk for intimate partner violence (Benson, Fox, DeMaris, and VanWyk, 2003). These consistent relationships between violence and economic disadvantage across various levels of aggregation suggest that temporal changes in the national economy that affect poverty and economic disadvantage should be associated with changes in crime and violence.

Research that has examined the effects of macroeconomic changes on crime trends has found that such conditions are related significantly to property crime rates net of criminal justice system effects such as incarceration and policing. For example, using state-level data, researchers have shown that changes in unemployment or wages (e.g., Raphael and Winter-Ebmer, 2001) and in gross state product (Arvanites and DeFina, 2006) significantly are related to property crime and robbery trends (see also Blumstein and Rosenfeld, 2008; Gould, Weinberg, and Mustard, 2002). In regional-level analyses, the ICS (a measure of perceived economic conditions) has been related significantly to property crime and robbery trends net of criminal justice measures and other economic indicators such as unemployment and gross domestic product (Rosenfeld and Fornango, 2007). However, aside from the crime of robbery—an economically motivated act of violence—most studies suggest that changes in economic conditions are *not* significantly related to trends in violence. Important exceptions can be found in the literature. For example, Messner, Raffalovich, and McMillan (2001) showed that changes in child poverty rates are significantly associated with changes in Black and White youth homicide arrests, and Grogger (2006) suggested that increases in wages are associated with the decline in violence during the 1990s but not with the increases in the late 1980s. A recent study by Rosenfeld (2009) found that changes in regional economic conditions as measured by the ICS have an indirect influence on homicide through their effect on acquisitive crime (robbery, burglary, and auto theft) rates. Although these studies are noteworthy exceptions, the common conclusion among criminologists is that changes in the economy are not associated with violence rates—a conclusion that is generally consistent with the aggregate UCR and NCVS trends displayed earlier in Figure 1.

How might the study of crime trends disaggregated by race and ethnicity help increase our understanding of the association between macroeconomic conditions and violence? As noted, one of the key lessons from studies of the homicide epidemic was the importance of disaggregating crime rates, particularly by race, to discern not only which groups were experiencing disproportionate increases but also to learn what factors might account for those changes. The same is true for research on rates of poverty and economic well-being, which will be discussed in more detail. That literature suggests that some past economic recessions have had a disproportionately greater impact on race and ethnic minorities, largely because less-skilled, low-income workers typically are hit hardest by economic downturns. Taken together with the findings on economic disadvantage and violent crime, these patterns imply that significant declines in the

national economy might have a greater impact on violent victimization rates among race and ethnic minorities than Whites.

Moreover, the need to learn more about the similarities and differences in long-term trends in serious violence by race and ethnicity goes beyond the study of economic conditions and crime. Scholars of race, ethnicity, and crime have continued to call for analyses that go beyond the Black–White dichotomy (e.g., Hawkins, 1995; Martinez, 2003; Peterson, Krivo, and Hagan, 2006). Little is known about long-term trends in Latino victimization or offending because analysts have relied on the UCR and Supplementary Homicide Report data, which lack sufficient detail on ethnicity. Cross-sectional research on homicide suggests that Latino violence is associated with economic conditions (Martinez, 1996); however, available data on these trends have been limited to selected cities and to shorter time series (e.g., Martinez and Lee, 2000). Comparisons among Black, White, and Latino trends can help illuminate the empirical commonalities and differences across groups and therefore provide additional insight into the potential structural and cultural sources of violent victimization.

### *Past Economic Recessions and Race and Ethnicity*

Popular discussions of bad economic times typically use the term “recession” to refer to the general condition of the economy; yet this discrete indicator of economic periods does not capture the length, breadth, or depth of an economic downturn. Recessionary periods in the United States have differed in the types of jobs and industries most affected, the rate at which hiring resumed, and in the degree to which poverty and unemployment rates increased during the recession and persisted after the end of the recession was declared. In addition, the nature and availability of jobless benefits, public assistance, or antipoverty programs has varied across recessions, as has the amount of government spending on these programs (Blank, 1997). We use the term “recession” to refer to the periods designated as such by the NBER (see footnote 2) and show how this indicator of the economy is associated with other macroeconomic indicators, including unemployment rates, poverty rates, and the ICS.

Although the nature and the consequences of each of the past recessions have differed, economists have noted for a long time that the poor experience the greatest relative loss of income and economic well-being during economic downturns, just as they gain relative to the wealthy when the economy recovers (e.g., Beach, 1977; Mirer, 1973; Thurow, 1970). Poverty rates increase during periods of economic decline partly because unemployment increases most among the least skilled and the poorest workers (e.g., Blank and Blinder, 1986). Less-skilled, low-income workers experienced greater shifts in employment than other groups during the recessions of the early 1980s and 1990s (see Blank, Danziger, and Schoeni, 2006). The recession of 2001, however, is unique in that both low- and high-skill groups experienced similar decreases in earnings because of the particular industries most affected by the downturn (Hall, 2006). In addition, smaller increases in poverty occurred during the recession of the 1970s than those of the 1980s and 1990s (Hoynes, Page, and Stevens, 2006). This trend might reflect higher levels of government subsidies (including unemployment benefits), which grew relative

to income through the mid-1970s before beginning to decline (see Blank and Blinder, 1986; also Gottschalk and Danziger, 1984). In short, apart from the early 2000s, economic cycles have had the greatest impact on poverty and economic well-being among workers and families at the bottom of the income distribution.

Because race and ethnic minorities are more likely than Whites to be low-skilled, low-income workers, their unemployment and economic well-being tends to be more sensitive to recession and recovery periods (e.g., Hoynes et al., 2006). Moreover, within the low-skilled male population, minorities seem to be affected more profoundly by economic downturns. Using data from the Current Population Survey for the period 1975–1997, Hoynes (2000: 47–49) showed greater employment declines among non-White, low-skilled males than White, low-skilled males during the recession of the early 1980s. Similarly, Borjas (2006) used the Census' Public Use Micro Sample data from 1980 to 2000 to show that the wages of low-skill minority immigrant men are affected substantially by economic cycles and that, among nonimmigrant workers, the chances of employment for Blacks and Latinos (especially low-skilled workers) are influenced more strongly by economic cycles than for White workers. For example, a 2 percentage point increase in national unemployment is associated with a 4 percentage point decrease in the likelihood of nonimmigrant Black employment (Borjas, 2006: 74).

Consistent with these findings, with few exceptions, a greater proportion of Blacks and Latinos dropped below the poverty line than did Whites during past recessions (see Census Bureau, 2010).<sup>3</sup> For example, prior to the start of recessions of the early 1980s, the percent of Whites, Blacks, and Latinos living below the federal poverty line in 1979 was 8.1, 31.0, and 21.8, respectively. By 1983, an additional 2.7% of Whites had fallen into poverty compared with an additional 4.7% of Blacks and 6.2% of Latinos. Race and ethnic differences in poverty increases were less pronounced during the recession of the early 2000s, perhaps because this recession affected both low- and high-skilled workers, as noted. Also, the increase in poverty among both Blacks and Whites was comparatively small during the recession of the early 1970s, perhaps in part because government transfers and spending were more generous (e.g., Blank and Blinder, 1986; Gottschalk and Danziger, 1984).

The evidence also suggests that past government spending has benefited the White poor proportionately more than the minority poor. Unemployment benefits have been received disproportionately by White males (Blank and Blinder, 1986). In the past, tax changes and government transfers replaced a larger fraction of the income lost to unemployment for poor, White male household heads than for poor, non-White male household heads (Gramlich and Laren, 1984). Research thus suggests that race differences in receipt of government transfers and benefits also might contribute to the greater disadvantage of minorities, particularly during times of economic downturn.

---

3. The exception occurred during the 1973–1975 recession when the percent of persons living in poverty among Whites and Blacks changed relatively little. The percent living in poverty among Whites in 1973 (the earliest available year in this data series) and 1976 was 7.5 and 8.1, respectively. The comparable rates for Blacks were 31.4 and 31.1 percent, respectively.

In addition to being more vulnerable to economic hardship during economic downturns, it has been argued for a long time that less-skilled workers also benefit more when the economy recovers and expands (e.g., Beach, 1977; Mirer, 1973; Thurow, 1970). However, recent commentators have questioned whether, in fact, “the rising tide” does indeed “lift all boats” (e.g., Freeman, 2001). For example, in the 1980s, the gross domestic product grew by 20%, whereas the aggregate poverty rate of families increased from 1979 to 1989; by the 1990s recession, the poverty rate was similar to what it was during the 1983 recession and was higher than any time since 1966 (Freeman, 2001: 98). In short, less-skilled workers—those most susceptible to unemployment and poverty—did not benefit as much as would be expected during the economic recovery of the 1980s.

Nevertheless, the economic boom of the 1990s changed the picture; the employment rates of the least-skilled workers grew during the expansion of 1990s, whereas it had been fairly stable during the expansion of the 1980s (Hall, 2006: 102–103). By 2000, the unemployment of low-skilled workers fell to levels of the 1960s (Freeman, 2001). These patterns were accompanied by a decrease in the poverty rates of the postrecession 1990s, back to the level of 1975 (Census, 2010). Moreover, as noted, the 2001 recession did not greatly affect less-skilled workers because it did not affect the industries in which they primarily are employed. In short, the 1990s into the early 2000s were a “relatively good period for the unskilled,” in part because of growth in industries that employ less-skilled workers, such as construction (Hall, 2006: 110–111). By the turn of the century, the U.S. employment rate was at a historic high (Freeman, 2001: 115), and declines (from 1992 to 2000) in the proportion living below poverty were greatest among Blacks and Latinos (Census, 2010).<sup>4</sup>

### *Background Summary*

The research literatures on homicide, poverty, and unemployment show the importance of disaggregating trends by race and ethnicity to understand better changes in violence and economic well-being over time. Past research has shown that minorities have been more susceptible to increases in poverty during economic downturns than Whites and that economic disadvantage is an important correlate of violence in cross-sectional analyses. We argue that if significant declines in the national economy contribute to violent crime increases, as some recent research suggests, then violent crime trends disaggregated by race and ethnicity should reveal greater changes among minorities during periods of economic downturn. Alternatively, if changes in national economic conditions are not associated with violent crime rates, then disaggregated trends should exhibit few short-term changes in rates during these periods as well as few differences in the trends across groups. If this scenario is the case, then the aggregate

4. During this period, the proportion of the Black population living below the federal poverty line fell 10.9 percentage points (from 33.4% to 22.5%); the proportion of the Latino population living below poverty fell 8.1 percentage points (from 29.6% to 21.5%); and the proportion of White population below living poverty fell 2.2 percentage points (from 9.6% to 7.4%). For the full poverty series estimates by race and ethnicity, see Census Bureau (2010).

violent victimization trend, which is dominated by the experiences of Whites, will not mask any important relationships between changing economic conditions and violence.

Of course, even if the disaggregated victimization trends display patterns that seem to be associated with national economic conditions, then such findings by themselves are insufficient for establishing an effect of economic downturns, or any other changing condition, on violence. It is clear from the existing literature that noneconomic factors, such as increases in incarceration and police per capita, and innovations in policing are associated with changes in crime rates (see, e.g., Baumer, 2008; Cook, 2009; Levitt, 2004; Zimring, 2006). The purpose of this research is not to assess the relative contribution of a variety of factors on trends in violence. Rather, we estimate and examine long-term trends in serious nonfatal violence for Black, Latino, and White males to disentangle race and ethnic differences in victimization and to discern whether such disaggregation provides new information about the potential relationship between changing national economic conditions and violent crime. These race and ethnic group trends have not been estimated in past research, and thus, the associations that we uncover here were not known previously.

## Data and Methods

To estimate the trends in serious violent victimization among Latino, Black, and White males, we compile data from the NCS and the NCVS for the period 1973–2005.<sup>5</sup> Descriptions of long-term trends in nonfatal violence for various sociodemographic subgroups must rely on data from the NCVS because the national UCR system does not include information about the characteristics of victims of nonfatal violence. Use of the NCVS also provides several important advantages; the data include crimes not reported to the police, allow for more refined disaggregations by victim characteristics including measures of Latino ethnicity not available elsewhere, and provide important details about the incident, such as the victim–offender relationship.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the only changes to the methodology that affected victimization rates were those associated with the transition from the NCS to the NCVS in 1992. Because this redesign was phased into the data collection process over an 18-month period, the effects of the new methodology on rate estimates can be assessed, and adjustment weights can be used to make estimates from

5. We used NCS and NCVS data made available through ICPSR (data sets 7635, 8608, 8864, and 4699). For more information, see [icpsr.umich.edu/NACJD/NCVS](http://icpsr.umich.edu/NACJD/NCVS). Because of several changes in sample and methodology, data for the 2006 NCVS represent a “break-in-series” and should not be compared with data from 2005 or 2007 (see Rand, 2008). We estimated rates for 2007 and could not detect any significant changes in violence from 2005 to 2007 as a result of a combination of reduced sample size and relatively little change in crime. Because we cannot link the 2006 data to either 2005 or 2007, and because the inclusion of 2007 does not alter the results reported here, we limit our analyses to 1973–2005.
6. The Bureau of Justice Statistics includes on their website estimates of long-term trends in violent victimization for “Blacks” and “Whites” using definitions of race employed by the Census Bureau. Because of this definition, no distinctions are made between Hispanics and non-Hispanic Blacks and Whites. Most Hispanics identify their race as “White” in the survey; thus, their rates are confounded primarily with those of “Whites” in the Bureau of Justice Statistics long-term trends. To view the Black versus White trends, see [bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/glance/tables/racetab.cfm](http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/glance/tables/racetab.cfm). The Bureau of Justice Statistics also documents trends in victimization according to race and ethnicity for the period 1993–2005 (see Harrell, 2007); however this period does not include a long enough series to examine victimization vis-à-vis past economic fluctuations.

the NCS and NCVS comparable over time (as discussed in a subsequent section).

As most criminologists know, the NCVS and its predecessor, the NCS, have been used to gather self-report data about individuals' experiences with violence and other forms of victimization continuously since 1973. The data are gathered by the Census Bureau and are sponsored by the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Using a nationally representative sampling frame, interviews are conducted with all persons aged 12 years and older in each sampled household.<sup>7</sup> The sample size of the NCVS has varied over time, ranging from approximately 275,000 interviews per year during the early 1970s to approximately 134,000 interviews per year in 2005 (Rennison and Rand, 2007).

Victimization experiences are measured through a series of cues and common-language questions and are coded into crime types after the interview. We define male *serious nonfatal violent victimization* to include attempted or completed robberies and aggravated assaults, which are attacks with a weapon or resulting in injury (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005).<sup>8</sup> *Race and ethnicity* are measured using self-reports to questions created and used by the Census Bureau. Following Census Bureau practices, NCVS items on race and ethnicity have changed over time.<sup>9</sup> To create a set of consistent categories, we combined responses to the "race" questions with responses to the "ethnicity" question and coded for the three largest racial and ethnic groups in the nation—Blacks, Whites, and Latinos (persons of Hispanic origin or descent who might be of any race). An insufficient number of subjects were found of other race and ethnic groups to provide reliable annual estimates.

We also estimate the trends in violence disaggregated by the victim–offender relationship. Our measure of *stranger* violence refers to incidents in which the victim reported that the offender was unknown to them, whereas *known/nonintimate* violence indicates that the offender

7. Because the multistage cluster sample is developed in accordance with population information for the United States, the data do not contain the limitations that might be associated with sample selection in random-digit dialing surveys. Persons in each sampled household address are interviewed either in person or by telephone once every 6 months over a 3.5-year period.
8. The level of rape victimization reported by males is extremely low in the NCS and NCVS. The inclusion of rape victimization had essentially no effect on the disaggregated estimates provided here.
9. Prior to 2003, respondents designated their race by selecting one of the following categories: "White, Black, American Indian/Aleut/Eskimo, Asian/Pacific Islander, or other." Beginning in 2003, respondents were permitted to select more than one race category, and the single race options included "White, Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander." Because the proportion choosing more than one race category in the 2003–2005 NCVS is small (approximately 1% of respondents), we restricted our analyses of those years to subjects who selected one race category. Ethnicity questions also changed over time. Prior to 1986, multiple categories were available for the ethnicity item, including "German, Italian, Irish, French, Polish, Russian, English, Scottish, Welsh, Mexican-American, Puerto-Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, Other Spanish, Afro-American, and Another Group Not Listed." Beginning in 1986, the ethnicity categories were defined as "Hispanic" and "non-Hispanic." To create a consistent definition of "Hispanic" or "Latina/Latino" ethnicity over time, persons who selected "Mexican-American, Puerto-Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or Other Spanish" were coded as "Hispanic" or "Latina/Latino." An assessment of population estimates throughout the definitional change period showed that the 1985 estimate of the Latino/Latina population was slightly lower than the 1986 estimate based on the "Hispanic" versus "non-Hispanic" option—a finding consistent with population trends.

was neither a stranger nor an intimate partner. Incidents in which more than one offender was present are coded as stranger if all offenders were unknown to the victim and as known/nonintimate if any of the offenders were known to the victim (but not an intimate partner). In the NCVS, levels of intimate partner violence reported by males are too low to be used reliably for studying long-term trends by race and ethnicity.

#### *Weighting Adjustments for Preredesign Rates*

One issue that has hampered the use of the NCVS data for estimating long-term trends in violence disaggregated by victim characteristics is the fact that the survey was redesigned in 1992 to improve the reporting of victimization (Kindermann, Lynch, and Cantor, 1997; Rand, Lynch, and Cantor, 1997). The pre-redesign data (NCS) and post-redesign data (NCVS) can be used to create a single time series, but doing so requires adjustment procedures that take into account the break in the series and weight the preredesign data in ways that are informed by research on the effects of the methodological and content changes to the survey. Adjustments to the data are possible because the redesigned NCVS instrument was phased into data collection over an 18-month period. Because both the NCS and NCVS questionnaires were administered simultaneously during these months, differences in the rates generated by the two instruments can be attributed to the differences in the questionnaires rather than to temporal changes in crime that might have occurred during this period. Crime-specific and subgroup-specific estimates from the NCVS interviews are compared with the same set of estimates from the simultaneously administered NCS interviews, and where statistically significant differences are found, the ratio of the two estimates can be used to weight the NCS data to make them comparable with data from the later NCVS years.

Research has demonstrated that the redesigned questionnaire significantly increased the reporting of victimization and that the magnitude of the change varied according to crime type (Kindermann et al., 1997; Rand et al., 1997). Our analyses revealed that the redesign did not have significantly different effects on males by race and ethnicity for the types of victimization studied here. Thus, the adjustment weights we use for the pre-redesign rates are the same for Latino, Black, and White males and are equal to those found in earlier analyses of the redesign effect. Victimization rates for the 1973–1991 NCS data were multiplied by 1.23 for aggravated assault incidents. Because the redesign did not generate significantly higher rates of robbery, no adjustments were applied to pre-redesign robbery estimates (see Kindermann et al., 1997).

### *Potential Data Limitations*

For the purpose of these analyses, the key strengths of the NCVS data are that they permit estimations of subgroup rates of victimization, include incidents not reported to the police, and have been available for more than 35 years. Aside from the redesign noted earlier, no methodological changes have been confounded with observed changes in violence rates.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, these data are subject to concerns that affect all survey data, such as recall error and underreporting and overreporting. Potential sources of error in the NCVS have been studied extensively (Groves and Cork, 2008; Lynch and Addington, 2007; Penick and Owens, 1976), and two issues that might be relevant to the trends are noted here. First, the use of adjustment weights for the pre-1992 data assumes that the effect of the new instrument would have been the same had it been phased in at a different time point; however, available data cannot assess this assumption (Rand et al., 1997). Second, the willingness of respondents to report violence, especially nonstranger incidents, to interviewers might have changed over time. This concern applies to all survey-based data gathered over time and derived from self-reports, and the magnitude of such changes and their potential effects on the trend estimates are unknown.

### *Analytic Approach*

Our analyses compare estimated long-term trends in Black, Latino, and White male rates of serious violent victimization and juxtapose these trends against the Index of Consumer Sentiment (ICS), following research by Rosenfeld and Fornango (2007).<sup>11</sup> The ICS is a summary measure derived from a long-standing and on-going survey of U.S. adults that includes questions about personal finances, assessments of the economy now and in the short- and long-term, and consumers' willingness to purchase large household items. The ICS captures the "subjective experience of economic hardship and change" (Rosenfeld and Fornango, 2007: 740) and is used as part of the Index of Leading Economic Indicators (Conference Board, 2009). According to Curtin (2004), changes in the ICS predict changes in gross domestic product and foreshadow the onset of recessions.

To illuminate the relationships between several commonly used national economic indicators, we display in Figure 2 recessionary periods and the trends in the ICS, poverty, and unemployment rates. For ease of comparison, we reverse the scaling of the ICS axis so that the peaks represent greater levels of *consumer pessimism*. As expected from the previous discussion,

---

10. Because we also are estimating serious violent victimization rates by victim-offender relationship, it is worth noting that the detail available for measuring this relationship increased in 1980 to allow respondents to distinguish girlfriends/boyfriends and ex-girlfriends/ex-boyfriends from other known offenders. This change has little effect on the analyses presented here because males reported few intimate partner incidents in the 1970s and early 1980s. However, this methodological change is consequential for estimates of known/nonintimate partner and intimate partner violence for females during the 1970s.

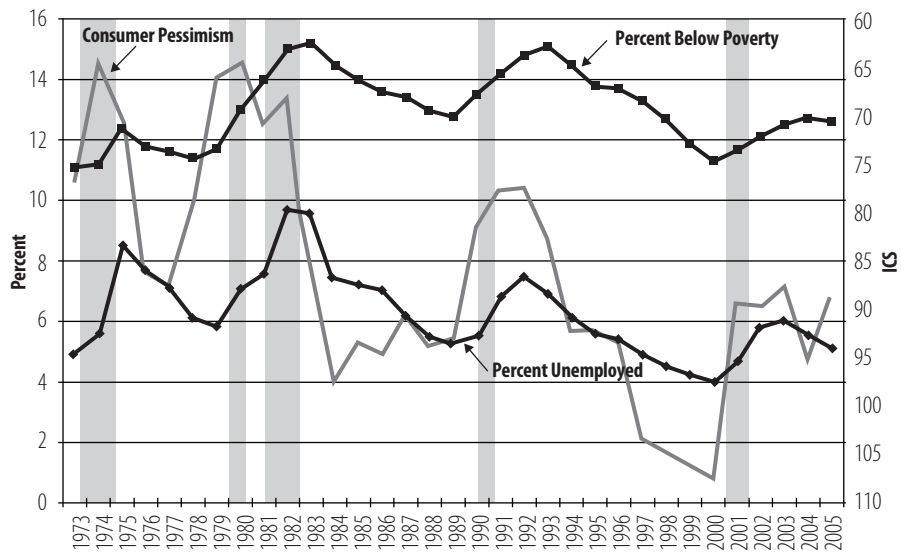
11. A complete discussion of the ICS is found in Curtin (2004) and Rosenfeld and Fornango (2007). Rosenfeld and Fornango found that consumer sentiment accounted for a significant amount of the change in robbery and property crime independent of the effects of unemployment, gross domestic product, age and race composition, and police and imprisonment. The ICS data are available at [sca.isr.umich.edu](http://sca.isr.umich.edu).



this figure shows that increases in levels of consumer pessimism precede the onset of recessions, and that consumer pessimism subsides as recessions end. Trends and fluctuations in consumer pessimism are followed by comparable patterns in national unemployment and poverty rates, which typically peak 1–2 years later. We focus on the ICS in our descriptive analysis because it captures attitudes and perceptions about the health of the economy that might be associated more closely with shifts in crime than are unemployment and poverty rates, which tend to lag behind recessions and do not necessarily reflect the subjective experience of economic hardship.

FIGURE 2

## National Economic Indicators: 1973-2005



## Results

### *Trends in Victimization by Race and Ethnicity*

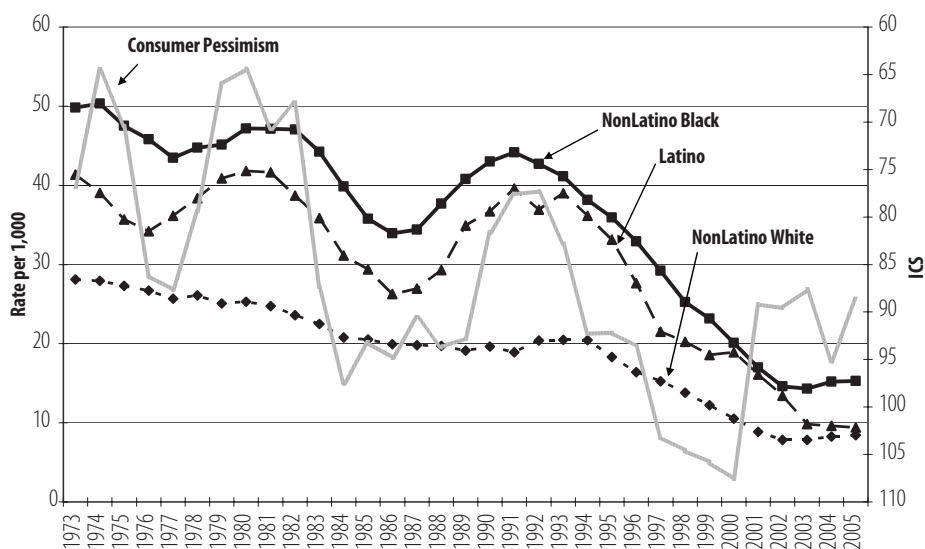
Figure 3 shows our estimates of the trends in male serious violent victimization disaggregated by race and ethnicity. The annual rates are displayed using 3-year moving averages to depict the overall trends better, and the national trend in consumer pessimism is superimposed on the figure.<sup>12</sup> This figure reveals several patterns that are not apparent in the aggregate violence trends shown earlier in Figure 1. First, Black males consistently have experienced the highest rates of serious nonfatal violence, replicating prior known trends using a shorter series. What has not been accomplished in previous analyses is the simultaneous disaggregation of race and ethnicity; hence, long-term trends and level differences for Latinos and Whites have remained unknown. Our results show that Latino male rates have been somewhat lower than those of Black males

12. Two-year averages are used for the endpoints.

throughout the series and that rates among White males were lowest throughout the period. Second, greater similarity is observed in the Black and Latino trends compared with the trend for Whites—similarities that would be masked in any Black–White comparisons that do not distinguish Latinos from Whites. Third, the rates of violence for minority males exhibited more fluctuation over time and were highest in 1973–1974, 1980–1982, and 1990–1993. In each of these instances, the peaks coincided with periods of economic recession and high consumer pessimism in the United States. Moreover, the fluctuations in the consumer pessimism trend correspond to those in the Latino and Black male trends until approximately 2001, when increases in consumer pessimism begin to decouple from the violence trends. In contrast, the rates for White males exhibit a fairly steady decline over the full series, which accelerated during the mid-to-late 1990s. The decline in nonfatal violence that appeared during the 1990s across all these race and ethnic groups coincided with the economic expansion of 1991–2001 and then slowed considerably around 2002.

FIGURE 3

### Male Serious Violent Victimization by Race and Ethnicity and Consumer Pessimism: 1973-2005



Thus, unlike the aggregate NCVS trend for serious violence, this figure suggests that some association exists between periods of economic downturn and levels of victimization; however, that association seems to be limited to Black and Latino males. This pattern is consistent with research on the association between recessionary periods and the unemployment and poverty rates of lesser skilled and minority workers, as discussed previously; Black and Latino males seem to be more vulnerable to increases in violent victimization as well as to increases in poverty and

unemployment during periods of economic downturn. The exception is the short recession of the early 2000s, which did not disproportionately affect low-skilled laborers (see Hall, 2006) and showed no differential association with the victimization rates of Black and Latino males. The patterns also suggest that the association between changing economic conditions and these victimization trends might have weakened in recent years.

The correlations of first-differences in these trends confirm these interpretations. We find that year-to-year changes in consumer pessimism are significantly correlated with year-to-year changes in male violence for Blacks ( $r = .35, p < .05$ ) and Latinos ( $r = .30, p < .05$ ), but this correlation is not statistically significant for Whites ( $r = .12$ ). The first-differenced correlations are stronger when limited to the period 1973–2000. Changes in consumer pessimism remain significantly associated with changes in violence for Blacks and Latinos ( $r = .51$  and  $r = .42$ , respectively) but fail to attain statistical significance for White males ( $r = .26$ ).

It is also important to note that Black and Latino males experienced a long period of decline in rates of violent victimization, including the well-known crime drop that began in the 1990s and continued into the 2000s. The magnitude of the decline in serious victimization across all three groups is noteworthy; from 1991 to 2003, violent victimization rates declined approximately 68% for Black, 75% for Latino, and 59% for White males. Although all groups exhibited substantial declines, the changes were somewhat greater among Latinos and Blacks. Interestingly, as noted, economic research has shown that low-skill and minority workers might benefit proportionately more from economic recoveries and that this fact was particularly true in the 1990s as a result of the expansion in the construction industry (e.g., Freeman, 2001; Hall, 2006).

#### *Trends in Victimization by Race and Ethnicity and Victim–Offender Relationship*

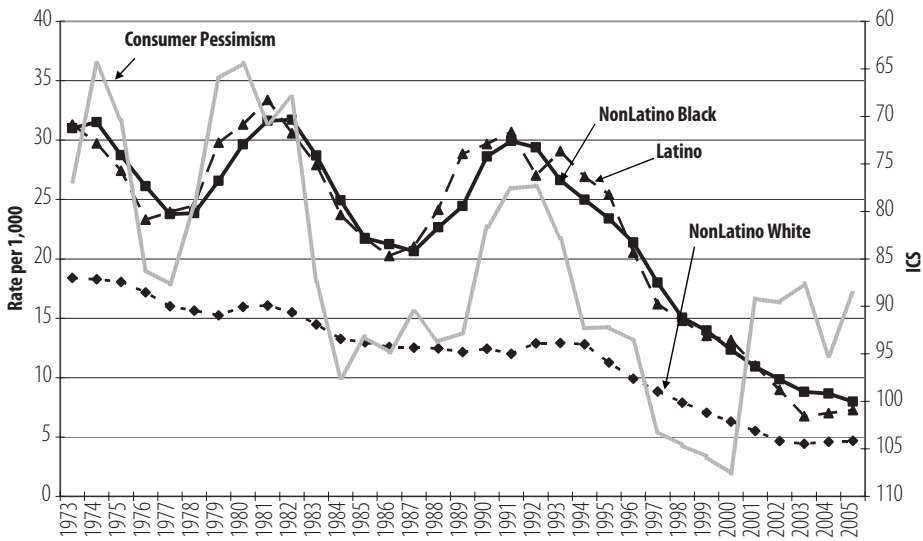
To explore the nature of the changes in serious violent victimization across race and ethnic subgroups, Figures 4 and 5 display the trends for incidents involving strangers (Figure 4) and known/nonintimates (Figure 5). Several findings are notable from a comparison of these trends. First, it is apparent that the periodic increases in male serious violence occur predominately in stranger crimes. The trends in male stranger violence exhibit the same increases and decreases that are found in the overall trends, whereas male violence by known/nonintimate offenders exhibits few of these fluctuations over time. Second, once the trends are disaggregated by victim–offender relationship, differences in the level of stranger victimization between Latino and Black males disappear. Despite the periodic increases and decreases that occur in serious stranger violence over time, Latino and Black males exhibit remarkably comparable risks. In contrast, White males experienced lower rates of serious stranger violence over time, and their rates do not fluctuate to the same extent. Third, the distinctive similarities in level and trend for Latino and Black male stranger violence are less apparent for known/nonintimate violence. For this type of victimization, the levels of risk are more similar for Latino and White males throughout the time series, and rates among Blacks became roughly comparable near the end of the 1990s. The last few years of the series suggest that known/nonintimate violence against

Black males began to increase in 2002; however, these later year-to-year differences are small, and the number of years is insufficient to know whether the subgroup rates are beginning to depart from one another.<sup>13</sup>

In sum, greater fluctuations over time are exhibited in the violent victimization trends for Latino and Black males than in the trends for White males, highlighting the importance of disaggregating trends by race and ethnicity. Rates for serious violent victimization and, more

**FIGURE 4**

**Male Serious Stranger Violent Victimization by Race and Ethnicity and Consumer Pessimism: 1973-2005**

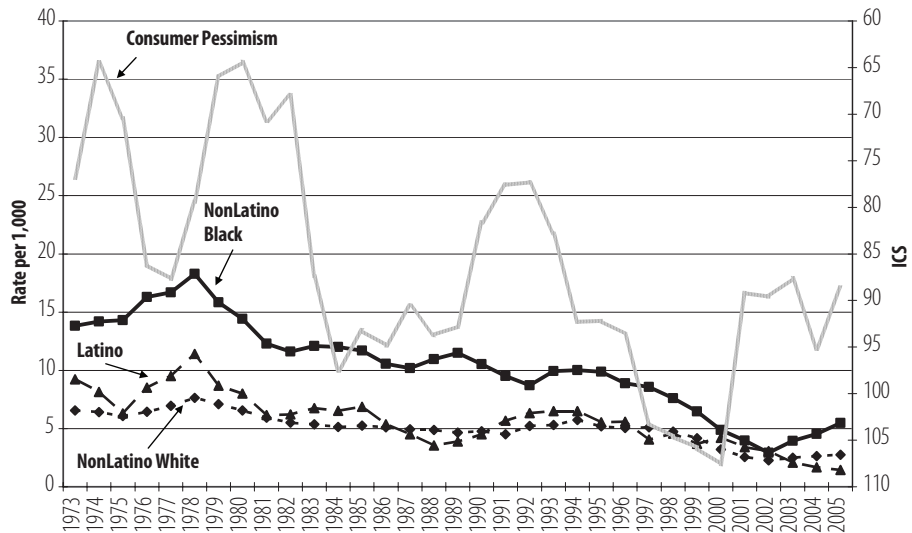


specifically, violence committed by strangers peaked for minority males during the economic recessions of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Previous research has not distinguished long-term trends in violence beyond descriptions of Black versus White differences and thus has missed noting the remarkable similarity in the trends and levels of violent stranger victimization for Latino and Black males. The fact that rates of stranger violence (and serious violence overall) peaked for Blacks and Latinos during or immediately after periods of recession, when levels of consumer pessimism were at their highest, suggests that the risk for serious violence for minority males might be more sensitive to changes in broader economic conditions.

13. First-differenced correlations indicated that changes in consumer pessimism significantly are correlated with male stranger violence for Blacks ( $r = .50, p < .05$ ) and Latinos ( $r = .35, p < .05$ ) but not for Whites ( $r = .24$ ). The first-differenced correlations increase when limited to the period 1973–2000. For Blacks, Latinos, and Whites, they are .61, .46, and .35, respectively, and in this instance, the correlation is statistically significant for Whites as well.

FIGURE 5

### Male Serious Known/Non-Intimate Violent Victimization by Race and Ethnicity and Consumer Pessimism: 1973-2005



#### *Trends in Robbery and Aggravated Assault Victimization by Race and Ethnicity*

Earlier, it was noted that researchers have found significant relationships between economic changes and robbery trends, changes in child poverty and homicide arrests, and an indirect effect of economic changes on homicide operating through their effect on property crime. No research has demonstrated a relationship between aggravated assault rates and downturns in the economy, perhaps in part because researchers have relied primarily on UCR data to study crime trends, and changes in police crime recording practices seem to have had important influences on UCR estimates of aggravated assault (Rosenfeld, 2007). Because our measure of serious violent victimization combines robbery and aggravated assault, it is possible that the patterns shown here might not characterize each type of violent victimization. To consider whether the patterns we observe are limited to economically motivated violence, we estimate trends for robbery (Figure 6) and aggravated assault (Figure 7) separately.

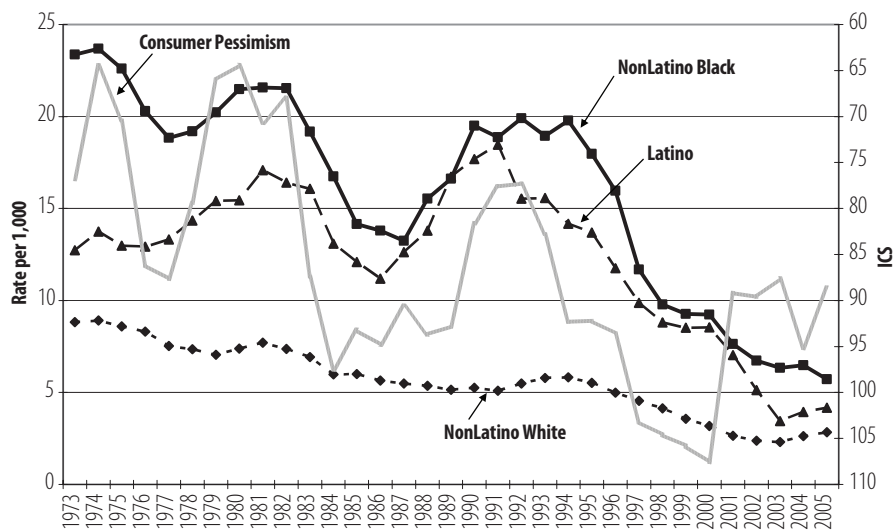
With some exceptions, the trends in male robbery victimization are similar to the overall trends depicted earlier in the figures for serious violence and stranger victimization. Rates are higher, and fluctuations in risk are larger for minority males with these fluctuations peaking during periods of high consumer pessimism. However, rates of robbery victimization among Latinos were not as high during the 1973–1975 period as might be expected based on the earlier

trends. Beginning in the 1980s, Black and Latino rates of robbery victimization were much more similar and congruent with the patterns in stranger violence shown earlier.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, with some exceptions, the trends in aggravated assault victimization among males generally are comparable with the overall trends in that the minority rates show larger periodic fluctuations than the White rates, generally peaking during periods of economic recession and

**FIGURE 6**

**Male Robbery Victimization by Race and Ethnicity  
and Consumer Pessimism: 1973-2005**



consumer pessimism. But for aggravated assault, levels of victimization among Blacks remained fairly stable during the period surrounding the recession of the early 1980s. Also, during the 1990s, the rates of assault for Latinos peaked 1–2 years after the end of 1990–1991 peak in consumer pessimism, which was about 1–2 years after the peak in rates for Black males. The rates of White male aggravated assault began to decline at roughly the same time as those of Latinos. In addition, the race and ethnic differences in risk for aggravated assault risk are smaller than those found for robbery.<sup>15</sup> Subsequent analyses (not shown) indicate that these variations from the overall pattern reflect the greater proportion of known offenders in aggravated assault

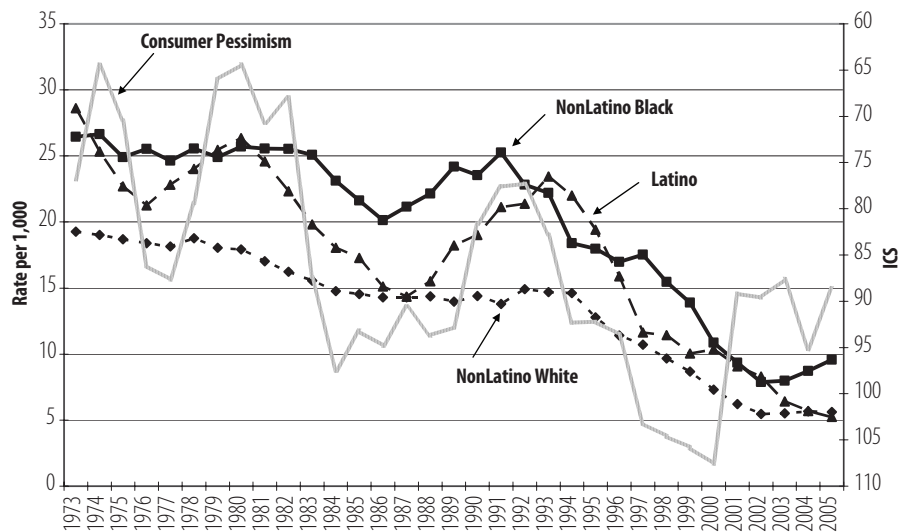
14. The first-differenced correlations for consumer pessimism and robbery for Blacks, Latinos, and Whites are .39 ( $p < .05$ ), .23 (ns), and .24 (ns), respectively. For the period 1973–2000, they increase to .53 ( $p < .05$ ), .39 ( $p < .05$ ), and .26 (ns). Thus, the association for Latinos is statistically significant only when limited to the period prior to 2001.

15. The first-differenced correlations for consumer pessimism and aggravated assault for Blacks, Latinos, and Whites are also weaker (.13 [ns], .28 [ns], and .09 [ns], respectively). For the period 1973–2000, they increase to .21 (ns) .35 ( $p < .05$ ), and .21 (ns), respectively.

incidents, which as shown earlier, exhibit less periodic fluctuation coinciding with economic downturns.<sup>16</sup> The trends in stranger aggravated assault for each of the three groups exhibit patterns much like those shown for stranger violence overall, except that the rates among White males are similar in level to those of minority males during periods when consumer pessimism is at its lowest (results available upon request). Thus, the periodic fluctuations in serious male violent

FIGURE 7

### Male Aggravated Assault Victimization by Race and Ethnicity and Consumer Pessimism: 1973-2005



victimization that correspond with recessionary periods are not strictly limited to economically motivated violence (i.e., robbery) but appear in aggravated assault by strangers. Serious stranger violence, rather than serious nonstranger violence, accounts for the overall patterns.

Across all figures, an apparent break occurs in the covariation between the trends in consumer pessimism and violent victimization against minority males beginning around 2001. Because this break is recent, it will be necessary for future work to examine data from the 2008 NCVS (not available at the time of this writing), which corresponds to the most recent economic downturn. This analysis will allow researchers to determine whether the break reflects a change in the nature of the relationship between trends in consumer pessimism and violence for Latino and Black males or whether it seems to be a temporary irregularity. In 2008, consumer pessimism rose to its highest level in more than 50 years (ICS = 64), which would represent a dramatic change from the levels shown in the figures presented here (Curtin, 2009). If this break

16. Figure available upon request from the authors.

in 2001 is a temporary aberration and the association between ICS and serious victimization remains consistent, then we would expect to see increases in serious violent victimization among minority males in the 2008 NCVS. If the NCVS data do not show some increase in serious violence, then subsequent research should determine what factors now might be moderating the relationship between economic conditions and minority victimization that was apparent during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

## Discussion

This research estimated and compared long-term trends in serious violence for Black, Latino, and White males to disentangle race and ethnic differences and to investigate whether such disaggregation provides new information about the potential relationship between changing economic conditions and violent victimization. Drawing on the literature that shows how past recessions have affected the employment and poverty rates of different race and ethnic groups, we have argued that if significant declines in the national economy contribute to increases in violent crime, then disaggregated victimization trends should reveal those relationships by showing greater changes among minorities during periods of economic downturn. We find strong similarities in the serious violent victimization trends among Latino and Black males, which is a pattern previously unknown to criminologists. Moreover, we also find that minority rates of serious male victimization exhibit fluctuations that coincide with recessionary periods and changes in perceived economic conditions. The reliance on aggregate UCR data has masked important similarities between Latino and Black males and has made it difficult to see how short-term changes in national economic conditions have been associated with short-term changes in violent victimization for some subgroups in the population. It is beyond the scope of this article to determine the specific sources of these shared fluctuations, but the patterns suggest that they are factors shared by Latinos and Blacks and are associated with economic downturns.

As discussed, Blacks and Latinos tend to suffer more than Whites during economic downturns because they are more likely to be employed in the least skilled jobs, which in some recessions are eliminated first and in greater proportions. Larger percentages of minorities have fallen into poverty during economic downturns, but the degree to which this occurs also has varied over time. This trend suggests that future research should rely on *group-specific* measures of macroeconomic indicators to examine more the hypothesis that changes in economic conditions are associated with changes in serious violent victimization (see also Messner et al., 2001). Such measures are likely to offer more insight into the nature of the relationship between economic conditions and violence across all groups than aggregate indicators, which are dominated by the experiences of the majority group.<sup>17</sup>

Of course, other factors have been shown to be related to crime trends, and these hypotheses warrant serious consideration by researchers in future research of these disaggregated

---

17. Long-term trends in poverty disaggregated by race and ethnicity are available from the Census Bureau; however, unemployment trend data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics do not distinguish Whites from Latinos for the earlier years in our series.



trends (see Baumer, 2008; Cook, 2009). For example, studies of homicide in the late 1980s and early 1990s showed that cocaine markets played a large role in the youth homicide epidemic, particularly among minorities (e.g., Blumstein and Rosenfeld, 1998; Blumstein and Wallman, 2006; Cook and Laub, 2002), and thus, drug markets might have direct or indirect effects on nonlethal violence rates. But it is important to note that we also found similar fluctuations in the early-to-mid-1970s and in the early-1980s, periods in which the crack cocaine market was not nearly so apparent, although other kinds of drug markets certainly did exist. It is possible that economic downturns are associated with increases in serious violent victimization primarily under conditions of serious drug market activity (Ousey and Lee, 2002); hence, drug markets might serve as a moderating factor. This finding might help account for why the recession and increase in consumer pessimism in 2001 was not associated with increases in violent victimization during that period. However, consistent and reliable measures of drug market activity over time are necessary for assessing this hypothesis, and the limited availability of such data has hampered such research.

Also consistent with the patterns we observe is the hypothesis that economic conditions are associated indirectly with serious violence through their influence on property crime rates. Rosenfeld (2009) found that consumer sentiment had an indirect effect on homicide through its effect on acquisitive crime rates. He argued that economic conditions affect the magnitude and scope of illegal property crime markets (i.e., the buying and selling of stolen goods) and that the activities of such markets increase the likelihood that violence will occur because inevitable disputes over stolen goods cannot be resolved legally. Future research that considers group-specific measures of involvement in these markets with group-specific indicators of economic factors and violence would provide an important additional test of this hypothesis. To our knowledge, direct measures of involvement in such markets are unavailable, but it might be possible to develop proxy indicators using group-specific property victimization rates and arrest rates for offending.

The previous hypotheses about moderating and indirect effects are informed by the well-known finding that involvement in illegal activities is an important correlate of an individual's risk for victimization (Lauritsen and Laub, 2007). But the associations we observe between economic conditions and serious violence among minority males represent the victimization experiences of a much larger number of persons than are likely to be involved in illegal markets. It is important to note that a victim's involvement in illicit markets is not a necessary condition for increased risk of violence. Rather, if drug and stolen goods markets are more likely to operate in disadvantaged areas, then persons living in these areas (by and large Blacks and Latinos) will face increased exposure to offenders during periods when these markets are more active, thereby increasing their likelihood of serious violent victimization. When this exposure occurs, increases in victimization are not the result of increased "target attractiveness" or decreased "capable guardianship" (Cohen and Felson, 1979), nor do they reflect changes in victims' "lifestyles" (Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo, 1978). Instead, they result from increases in the numbers of "motivated offenders" in such areas.

Beyond the potential influences of changes in illicit markets on changes in violence, it is obviously important to incorporate measures of policy efforts to reduce crime in future studies of these trends. The most common variables in policy research on crime trends have investigated the effects of changes in the law, and changes in criminal justice practices, such as policing and incarceration. Such factors have been shown to be significant at various levels of analysis (e.g., Baumer, 2008; Levitt, 2004; Zimring, 2006). Our findings suggest that researchers also should consider whether changes in criminal justice policy have differential implications for group-specific victimization trends. Without such analyses, it is unknown whether existing results from studies of criminal justice policies overgeneralize the nature and magnitude of estimated effects on crime and violence because they are dominated by relationships that exist for the majority group. It is conceivable that changes in factors such as policing or incarceration might have relatively large effects on the violent victimization experiences of some groups but have a lesser influence on others. Additional research along these lines would provide important insights about the nature of the effects of criminal justice system policies on violent crime trends (i.e., who benefits and under what conditions) and also whether these policies have differential effects over time. For example, it is possible that policing had relatively little effect on violence during the 1970s and 1980s but that more recent innovations in policing contributed to the weakening of the relationship between economic conditions and violence that we note in 2001. If so, the impact of economic downturns on violence might be conditional on the quality of police response (Cook, 2009).

Finally, but importantly, we believe that our findings suggest a need for criminologists to expand their analyses of public policy to include the potential effects of large-scale social-welfare programs. Certainly, the federal government's efforts to respond to the most recent economic recession through policies that extend unemployment benefits, provide new money to fund jobs for "shovel-ready" projects, attempt to reduce home foreclosures, and so on are reminders that macrolevel economic policies can change dramatically and should be assessed for their possible effects on crime regardless of whether such outcomes were part of the original intention of the policy. With some important exceptions, public policy research in criminology has focused on assessing criminal justice policies, controlling for a series of socioeconomic indicators. Knowledge about how other policy changes might affect violent crime trends is scant and is an important area for future research. Existing cross-sectional research has shown that welfare benefits (measured using a variety of indicators) are significantly and negatively associated with property crime rates across states (Zhang, 1997) and cities (DeFronzo, 1996; Hannon and DeFronzo, 1998a), controlling for a variety of sociodemographic factors. Past research has found that Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) benefits have significant direct and indirect effects on city homicide rates (DeFronzo, 1997; DeFronzo and Hannon, 1998), whereas others have found that the level of welfare benefits conditions the relationship between economic deprivation and crime (Hannon and DeFronzo, 1998b).

If social supports, such as welfare benefits, are associated significantly with crime across places, then it is possible that changes in these support policies are associated with changes

in crime and that benefit levels might condition the relationship between economic changes and violent crime trends. If so, then models that fail to incorporate measures of benefits or other social supports are likely to underestimate the relationship between economic changes and crime. In fact, recent research by Johnson, Kantor, and Fishback (2009) suggests that this potential misspecification characterizes criminologists' understanding of crime trends during the Great Depression. Criminologists are aware of the fact that crime decreased during the 1930s, and many have assumed from this trend that large economic crises are unrelated to crime. However, in a city-level panel analysis of UCR data from 1930 to 1940, Johnson et al. showed that increases in relief spending are associated significantly with decreases in property crime (but not in violent crime). Using city and time fixed effects, as well as controls for police spending per capita and other factors, they also found that "work-relief" had larger effects than "direct-relief" spending on property crime. Such findings suggest that crime rates might have been higher and not declined if not for the large increases in relief spending that occurred during the 1930s. Furthermore, models that fail to consider social support and employment programs also might overestimate the relationship between criminal justice policies and crime if changes in those criminal justice policies (such as increased number of police) are associated positively with changes in social supports (such as efforts to extend unemployment benefits and increase jobs).

The eventual length and magnitude of the most recent economic crisis is unknown, and forecasting economic trends, as well as forecasting violence and crime rates, has been fraught with error. Nonetheless, the results presented here give some indication that the current economic crisis has the potential to produce increased rates of serious violence. The degree to which this increase might occur is likely to depend on a variety of factors, including the extent to which the crisis results in significant increases in poverty, prolonged joblessness, a downward spiral of wages and prices, losses of other income and assets, and housing and neighborhood disruptions, as well as policy responses to these conditions. Several years ago, Hall (2006) noted that economic expansion, particularly in the construction industry during the 1990s, benefited low-skill workers, and he predicted that the end of the housing bubble "will bear negatively on the less educated workforce of that industry" (2006: 111). Although economic distress is likely to increase among all race and ethnic groups, it might be greatest among Blacks and Latinos because of their greater economic vulnerability (e.g., higher unemployment rates) and the disproportionate employment of these groups in the manufacturing, service, and construction industries (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010a, 2010b). Data from the most recent recession indicate that employment problems indeed have been most acute among Blacks and Latinos (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009).

Recent government efforts to minimize some of the impact of the current economic crisis should prompt criminological policy research to expand to include analyses of the potential effects of social welfare and employment programs to assess whether they might have broader benefits that include reducing or dampening possible increases in serious violent victimization. Such efforts will help refine our understanding of the relationship between race and ethnic-

ity, changing economic conditions, social and criminal justice policies, and serious violent victimization.

## References

- Arvanites, Thomas M. and Robert H. DeFina. 2006. Business cycles and street crime. *Criminology*, 44: 139–164.
- Audi, Tamara and Gary Fields. 2010. Los Angeles is latest city to see crime drop. *Wall Street Journal*, January 7.
- Baumer, Eric P. 2008. An empirical assessment of the contemporary crime trends puzzle: A modest step toward a more comprehensive research agenda. In (Arthur S. Goldberger and Richard Rosenfeld, eds.), *Understanding Crime Trends: Workshop Report*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Beach, Charles M. 1977. Cyclical sensitivity of aggregate income inequality. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 59: 56–66.
- Benson, Michael L., Greer Litton Fox, Alfred DeMaris, and Judith VanWyk. 2003. Neighborhood disadvantage, individual economic distress, and violence against women in intimate relationships. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 19: 207–236.
- Blank, Rebecca M. 1997. *It Takes a Nation: A New Agenda for Fighting Poverty*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Blank, Rebecca M. and Alan S. Blinder. 1986. Macroeconomics, income distribution, and poverty. In (Sheldon H. Danziger and Daniel H. Weinberg, eds.), *Fighting Poverty: What Works and What Doesn't*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Blank, Rebecca M., Sheldon H. Danziger, and Robert F. Schoeni. 2006. Work and poverty during the past quarter-century. In (Rebecca M. Blank, Sheldon H. Danziger, and Robert F. Schoeni, eds.), *Working and Poor*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Blumstein, Alfred and Richard Rosenfeld. 1998. Explaining recent trends in U.S. homicide rates. *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 88: 1175–1216.
- Blumstein, Alfred and Richard Rosenfeld. 2008. Factors contributing to U.S. crime trends. In (Arthur S. Goldberger and Richard Rosenfeld, eds.), *Understanding Crime Trends: Workshop Report*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Blumstein, Alfred and Joel Wallman. 2006. *The Crime Drop in America, Revised Edition*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Borjas, George J. 2006. Wage trends among disadvantaged minorities. In (Rebecca M. Blank, Sheldon H. Danziger, and Robert F. Schoeni, eds.), *Working and Poor*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Bureau of Justice Statistics. 2005. *Statistical Methodology for Criminal Victimization in the U.S., 2005*. Retrieved January 15, 2010 from [bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/cvus/cvus05mt.pdf](http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/cvus/cvus05mt.pdf).
- Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2009. *Labor Force Characteristics by Race and Ethnicity, 2008*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor. Retrieved January 15, 2010 from [bls.gov/cps/race\\_ethnicity\\_2008.htm](http://bls.gov/cps/race_ethnicity_2008.htm).

- Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010a. *Household Data Annual Averages: Employed Persons by Occupation, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity, and Sex, 2007–08*. Retrieved January 15, 2010 from [bls.gov/cps/cpsaat10.pdf](http://bls.gov/cps/cpsaat10.pdf).
- Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010b. *Table 1: Employment and Unemployment in Families by Race and Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity, 2007–08 Annual Averages*. Retrieved January 15, 2010 from [bls.gov/news.release/famee.t01.htm](http://bls.gov/news.release/famee.t01.htm).
- Census Bureau. 2010. *Poverty Status of People by Family Relationship, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1959–2007*. Retrieved January 15, 2010 from [census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/histpov/hstpov2.xls](http://census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/histpov/hstpov2.xls).
- Cohen, Lawrence E. and Marcus Felson. 1979. Social change and crime rate trends: A routine activities approach. *American Sociological Review*, 44: 588–608.
- Conference Board. 2009. *The Conference Board Leading Economic Index (LEI) for the United States*. Retrieved January 15, 2010 from [conference-board.org/pdf\\_free/economics/bci/USLEItech\\_1209.pdf](http://conference-board.org/pdf_free/economics/bci/USLEItech_1209.pdf).
- Cook, Philip J. 2009. Crime control in the city: A research-based briefing on public and private measures. *Cityscape: A Journal of Policy Development and Research*, 11: 53–79.
- Cook, Philip J. and John H. Laub. 2002. After the epidemic: Recent trends in youth violence in the United States. In (Michael H. Tonry, ed.), *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, Vol. 29. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Cramer, Maria. 2009. Economy fuels rise in crime, police say. *The Boston Globe*, March 10.
- Curtin, Richard. 2004. Psychology and macroeconomics. In (James House, Thomas Juster, Robert Kahn, Howard Schuman, and Eleanor Singer, eds.), *A Telescope on Society: Survey Research at the University of Michigan and Beyond*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Curtin, Richard. 2009. *Final report 1/2009 Surveys of Consumers*. Ann Arbor: Reuters, University of Michigan. Retrieved January 15, 2010 from [sca.isr.umich.edu/documents.php?c=r](http://sca.isr.umich.edu/documents.php?c=r).
- DeFronzo, James. 1996. Welfare and burglary. *Crime & Delinquency*, 42: 223–230.
- DeFronzo, James. 1997. Welfare and homicide. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 34: 395–406.
- DeFronzo, James and Lance Hannon. 1998. Welfare assistance levels and homicide rates. *Homicide Studies*, 2: 31–45.
- Freeman, Richard. 2001. The rising tide lifts ...? In (Sheldon H. Danziger and Robert H. Havemen, eds.), *Understanding Poverty*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Gottschalk, Peter and Sheldon H. Danziger. 1984. Macroeconomic conditions, income transfers, and the trend in poverty. In (D. Lee Bawken, ed.), *The Social Contract Revisited*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Gould, Eric D., Bruce A. Weinberg, and David B. Mustard. 2002. Crime rates and local labor market opportunities in the United States, 1979–1997. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 84: 45–61.

- Gramlich, Edward M. and Deborah S. Laren. 1984. How widespread are income losses in a recession? In (D. Lee Bawken, ed.), *The Social Contract Revisited*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Grogger, Jeffrey. 2006. An economic model of recent trends in violence. In (Alfred Blumstein and Joel Wallman, eds.), *The Crime Drop in America*, Revised Edition. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Groves, Robert M. and Daniel L. Cork. 2008. *Surveying Victims: Options for Conducting the National Crime Victimization Survey*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Hall, Robert E. 2006. The macroeconomy and determinants of the earnings of less-skilled workers. In (Rebecca M. Blank, Sheldon H. Danziger, and Robert F. Schoeni, eds.), *Working and Poor*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Hannon, Lance and James DeFronzo. 1998a. Welfare and property crime. *Justice Quarterly*, 15: 273–288.
- Hannon, Lance and James DeFronzo. 1998b. The truly disadvantaged, public assistance, and crime. *Social Problems*, 45: 383–392.
- Harrell, Erika. 2007. *Black Victims of Violent Crime, 1993–2005*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Hauser, Christine and Al Baker. 2008. Keeping wary eye on crime as economy sinks. *New York Times*, October 10.
- Hawkins, Darnell F. 1995. *Ethnicity, Race, and Crime: Perspectives across Time and Place*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Hindelang, Michael J., Michael R. Gottfredson, and James Garofalo. 1978. *Victims of Personal Crime: An Empirical Foundation for a Theory of Personal Victimization*. Cambridge, MA: Ballinger.
- Hoynes, Hilary W. 2000. The employment, earnings, and income of less-skilled workers over the business cycle. In (David E. Card and Rebecca M. Blank, eds.), *Finding Jobs: Work and Welfare Reform*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Hoynes, Hilary W., Marianne E. Page, and Ann Huff Stevens. 2006. Poverty in America: Trends and explanations. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 20: 47–68.
- Johnson, Ryan S., Shawn Kantor, and Price V. Fishback. 2009. *Striking at the Roots of Crime: The Impact of Welfare Spending on Crime during the Great Depression*. NBER working paper. Retrieved January 15, 2010 from nber.org.
- Kindermann, Charles, James P. Lynch, and David Cantor. 1997. *Effects of the Redesign on Victimization Estimates*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Krivo, Lauren J., Ruth D. Peterson, and Danielle C. Payne. 2009. Segregation, racial structure, and neighborhood crime. *American Journal of Sociology*, 114: 1765–1802.
- Land, Kenneth C., Patricia L. McCall, and Lawrence E. Cohen. 1990. Structural covariates of homicide rates: Are there any invariances across time and social space? *American Journal of Sociology*, 95: 922–963.
- Land, Kenneth C., Patricia L. McCall, and Lawrence E. Cohen. 1991. Characteristics of U.S. cities with extreme (high or low) crime rates: Results of discriminant analyses of 1960, 1970, and 1980 data. *Social Indicators Research*, 24: 209–231.

- Lauritsen, Janet L. 2001. The social ecology of violent victimization: Individual and contextual effects in the NCVS. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 17: 3–32.
- Lauritsen, Janet L. and John H. Laub. 2007. Understanding the link between victimization and offending: New reflections on an old idea. *Crime Prevention Studies* 22: 55–76.
- Lauritsen, Janet L. and Norman A. White. 2001. Putting violence in its place: The effects of race, ethnicity, gender, and place on the risk for violence. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 1: 37–60.
- Levitt, Steven D. 2004. Understanding why crime fell in the 1990s: Four factors that explain the decline and six that do not. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 18: 163–190.
- Li, Lucy. 2009. No direct link between crime, economy, experts contend. *The Cornell Daily Sun*, April 14.
- Lynch, James P. and Lynn A. Addington (eds.). 2007. *Understanding Crime Statistics: Revisiting the Divergence of the NCVS and UCR*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Martinez, Jr., Ramiro. 1996. Latinos and lethal violence: The impact of poverty and inequality. *Social Problems*, 43: 131–46.
- Martinez, Jr. Ramiro. 2003. Moving beyond black and white violence: African American, Haitian, and Latino homicides in Miami. In (Darnell F. Hawkins, ed.), *Violent Crime: Assessing Race and Ethnic Differences*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Martinez, Jr., Ramiro and Matthew T. Lee. 2000. On immigration and crime. In (Gary LaFree, ed.), *Criminal Justice 2000*, Vol. 1. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Messner, Steven F., Lawrence E. Raffalovich, and Richard McMillan. 2001. Economic deprivation and changes in homicide arrest rates for white and black youths, 1967–1998: A national time-series analysis. *Criminology*, 39: 591–614.
- Mirer, Thad W. 1973. The effects of macroeconomic fluctuations on the distribution of income. *Review of Income and Wealth*, 21: 385–405.
- National Bureau of Economic Research. 2003. *The NBER's Recession Dating Procedure, 2003*. Retrieved January 15, 2010 from [nber.org/cycles/recessions.html](http://nber.org/cycles/recessions.html).
- National Bureau of Economic Research. 2010. *Business Cycle Expansions and Contractions*. Retrieved January 15, 2010 from [nber.org/cycles.html](http://nber.org/cycles.html).
- Ousey, Graham C. and Matthew R. Lee. 2002. Examining the conditional nature of the illicit drug market–homicide relationship: A partial test of the theory of contingent causation. *Criminology*, 40: 73–102.
- Penick, Betty K. E. and Maurice Owens (eds.). 1976. *Surveying Crime*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Peterson, Ruth D., Lauren J. Krivo, and John Hagan. 2006. *The Many Colors of Crime*. New York: New York University Press.
- Pratt, Travis C. and Francis T. Cullen. 2005. Assessing macro-level predictors and theories of crime: A meta-analysis. In (Michael H. Tonry, ed.), *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, Vol. 32. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Rand, Michael R. 2008. *Criminal Victimization, 2007*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.

- Rand, Michael R., James P. Lynch, and David Cantor. 1997. *Criminal Victimization, 1973–1995*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Raphael, Stephen and Rudolf Winter-Ebmer. 2001. Identifying the effects of unemployment on crime. *Journal of Law and Economics*, 44: 259–283.
- Rennison, Callie Marie and Michael R. Rand. 2007. Introduction to the National Crime Victimization Survey. In (James P. Lynch and Lynn A. Addington, eds.), *Understanding Crime Statistics: Revisiting the Divergence of the NCVS and UCR*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Rosenfeld, Richard. 2007. Explaining the divergence between UCR and NCVS aggravated assault trends. In (James P. Lynch and Lynn A. Addington, eds.), *Understanding Crime Statistics: Revisiting the Divergence of the NCVS and UCR*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Rosenfeld, Richard. 2009. Crime is the problem: Homicide, acquisitive crime, and economic conditions. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 25: 27–306.
- Rosenfeld, Richard and Robert Fornango. 2007. The impact of economic conditions on robbery and property crime: The role of consumer sentiment. *Criminology*, 45: 735–769.
- Sampson, Robert J., Stephen W. Raudenbush, and Felton Earls. 1997. Neighborhoods and violent crime: A multilevel study of collective efficacy. *Science*, 277: 918–924.
- Thurow, Lester. 1970. Analyzing the American income distribution. *American Economic Review*, 60: 261–269.
- Zhang, Junsen. 1997. The effects of welfare programs on criminal behavior: A theoretical and empirical analysis. *Economic Inquiry*, 35: 120–137.
- Zimring, Franklin E. 2006. *The Great American Crime Decline*. New York: Oxford University Press.

---

**Janet L. Lauritsen** is a professor of criminology and criminal justice at the University of Missouri—St. Louis. With support from the National Institute of Justice, she and Karen Heimer have developed estimates of long-term trends in violent victimization by gender and various sociodemographic characteristics. These trends serve as the basis for current research on violence against women and youth violence. Her recent publications appear in *Criminology*, *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, and the National Research Council volume, *Understanding Crime Trends*.

**Karen Heimer** is a professor of sociology and works at the Public Policy Center at the University of Iowa. She is working with Janet L. Lauritsen on studies of various dimensions of gender and race differences in violence victimization, including an extension of the present article to examine patterns of women's victimization over time. Her other current research focuses on gender, race, and imprisonment trends, as well as on gender differences in violent offending. Recent publications appear in *Criminology*, *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, and *Understanding Crime Trends*.



## POLICY ESSAY

---

### VIOLENT VICTIMIZATION AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

## Property crime—yes; violence—no

### Comment on Lauritsen and Heimer

**Philip J. Cook**

*Duke University*

For 150 years, empirical criminologists have analyzed the relationship between general economic conditions and crime. The evidence is consistent that property crime, including robbery, is mildly countercyclical (with at least one exception—auto theft). The evidence with respect to violent crime is less clear but points to little or no relationship. Lauritsen and Heimer's (2010, this issue) contribution is to refocus the discussion on victimization rates rather than on commission rates and to disaggregate by ethnicity. They find evidence that nonlethal violent victimization is countercyclical for Black and Latino males, but that result is limited to crimes committed by strangers and to robberies (as opposed to aggravated assaults). It is reasonable to interpret their article as confirming earlier findings.

In this essay, I provide a brief sketch of the mechanisms that in principle could generate a relationship between the business cycle and crime followed by a few highlights from the history of empirical research on this subject. I report results from my own research, past and current, and then go on to discuss the distinction between victimization and perpetration. I conclude with a short homily on why we should be interested in this line of inquiry. A key point throughout this commentary is that business cycles are extremely complex “experiments” with many crime-related variables changing simultaneously (or nearly so).

#### **Mechanisms and Findings**

The history of all advanced economies has been characterized by secular economic growth with an overlay of short-term cycles. The profound changes in technology, standard of living, culture, and routine activities associated with long-term economic growth affect criminal opportunities and behavior in a variety of ways, and no theoretical basis exists for predicting the net effect. Even the short-term fluctuations in socioeconomic conditions associated with the business

---

Direct correspondence to Philip J. Cook, Duke University, Sanford School of Public Policy, Durham, NC 27708 (e-mail: pcook@duke.edu).

cycle are likely to have complex effects on crime with no clear prediction. The following is an incomplete accounting of the plausible mechanisms relating the business cycle to crime (Cook and Zarkin, 1985):

1. Legitimate opportunities. Economic recessions might increase property crime rates by reducing access to a legitimate means for achieving a desired standard of living. Recession might increase *both* property and violent crime rates by reducing the opportunity cost of time spent in connection with criminal activity (including time in jail or prison).
2. Criminal opportunities. Recessions also might affect the quality of criminal opportunities. Potential burglary victims are more likely to be home (and thus serving as guardians for their property), and robbery victims will be carrying less cash and are perhaps more inclined to defend what they have. Prices for fenced merchandise might go down. As a result of such changes, property crime will be less profitable in bad times than in good.
3. Drugs and alcohol. Alcohol consumption goes down in recessions (Cook, 2007). To the extent that intoxication plays a role in crime, especially violent crime (both victimization and perpetration), we would expect fewer assaults. The cyclical pattern of drug use is less clear.
4. Police and corrections. Recessions reduce state and local tax collections, which might result in cuts in policing and corrections. The result might be some attenuation of the effects of the criminal justice system on crime via deterrence, incapacitation, and rehabilitation.

Even this incomplete list of possible linkages suggests that social scientists should have no trouble providing an explanation for most any empirical findings relating the business cycle to crime. Fortunately, the empirical findings are consistent for some types of crime, and social scientists have been analyzing the data on this issue for a long time, at least since the mid-19th century (Bonger, 1916).

Thorsten Sellin's (1937) *Research Memorandum on Crime in the Depression* quoted a review of the literature written by Joseph Van Kan (1903) as follows:

Crimes against property find in large measure their indirect causality in bad economic conditions; their direct causality in acute need and even more in chronic misery. . . . Material well-being generally exalts the vital instincts, increases alcohol consumption, and therefore increases crimes against morals. All our literature confirms this fact. . . . As for the question of the extent of the influence of economic factors on offenses against persons, the answers are less uniform.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, Dorothy Swaine Thomas' (1927) classic study *Social Aspects of the Business Cycle* reported correlations between detrended crime measures and an indicator of business conditions for Britain, 1857–1913, finding strong negative correlations for burglary and robbery and no effect for crimes of violence. These findings have stood up well during the ensuing century.

---

1. Joseph Van Kan, *Les Causes économiques de la criminalité* (1903), cited in Sellin (1937), p. 23.

I will not attempt to review the vast subsequent literature (some of which is referenced in Lauritsen and Heimer [2010]), except to mention my work, which is in line with Dorothy Thomas' results. An analysis of U.S. business cycles (Cook and Zarkin, 1985) used annual time series for four types of index crime for the period 1933–1982, employing each of the nine cycles during that period as a “trial” in a natural “experiment.” We also computed regression results on postwar data that are very similar in spirit to the correlations reported in the Lauritsen and Heimer study in that we adjusted the variables for short-term trends. (Lauritsen and Heimer use a first-difference form, whereas we normed the variables by 3-year moving averages.) We used two different measures of economic conditions—the unemployment rate and the employment–population ratio.<sup>2</sup> Both our nonparametric “natural experiment” study and the regression analyses confirmed that burglary and robbery are countercyclical and that homicide rates are not influenced (on balance) by the business cycle. The most surprising result was for auto theft; it is strongly *procyclical*, presumably reflecting profitability considerations.<sup>3</sup> (The market for stolen cars and parts might be procyclical.) Recently, this research was extended using crime-series data through 2008, confirming and sharpening the findings from the earlier research (Bushway, Cook, and Phillips, 2010). The effect of economic fluctuations on homicide rates is a rather precisely measured “zero,” whereas property crimes are responsive.

Our conclusions, based on post-War Uniform Crime Report data through 2008, can be summarized as follows: A 10% increase in the unemployment rate (from, say, 9.0% to 9.9%) has the effect of increasing the robbery rate by 1.7%, increasing the burglary rate by 1.2%, and reducing the auto theft rate by 0.6% (Bushway et al., 2010). These effects are not large relative to the huge swings in crime rates that we have experienced since 1960, but they are estimated with considerable precision. The statistical effect on criminal homicide is effectively nil.

### Effects on Victimization

Lauritsen and Heimer's (2010) article offers several innovations, the most important of which is to use victimization-survey data rather than data from official records. Their dependent variable is the male victimization rate of attempted or completed robberies and aggravated assaults. They track three groups: Blacks, Latinos, and (non-Latino) Whites.<sup>4</sup> In each case, they find a positive correlation between first differences in the violent victimization rate and their measure of economic conditions. The correlation is not significantly different from zero for Whites, but it is for the other two groups. Lauritsen and Heimer report qualitatively similar results

2. The employment ratio is not just the complement of the unemployment rate. The denominators are different. The unemployment rate is defined relative to the labor force, which excludes people who are not working or looking for work. The employment ratio includes the entire adult population in the denominator, which unlike the labor force measure, is not affected by the business cycle.

3. See Paternoster and Bushway (2001) for an analysis of cyclicity of auto theft by age.

4. The authors disaggregated the crime victimization rates by ethnicity but did not do so for the Index of Consumer Sentiment, which is their main measure of economic conditions. In the future, it might be of interest to disaggregate the Index of Consumer Sentiment as well.

when they limit the “crime” variable to attacks by strangers. When they distinguish between robbery and aggravated assault, they find that Black robbery victimization is countercyclical, but the robbery results for Latinos and Whites are not significant—nor are any correlations for aggravated assault.

I take these results to be compatible with the literature as summarized earlier. Over the business cycle, robbery (a crime motivated by property acquisition) tends to be countercyclical (at least for one major victim group), but other crimes of violence that lack a property motive are not tied closely to macroeconomic conditions.

Lauritsen and Heimer’s (2010) use of victimization data encourages a particular line of speculation focused on the actions of potential victims rather than (or in addition to) that of potential perpetrators. Is there reason to believe that recessions are victimogenic? Perhaps, although they are not obviously so. Risk factors for robbery victimization, like getting drunk and carrying large amounts of cash or bling, are likely to be *less* common in recessions. The one exception that occurs to me is homelessness; the homeless are vulnerable to robbery, and it is reasonable to believe that homelessness is countercyclical. But by itself that would not account for the observed pattern in robbery victimization, especially in survey data (which does not include the homeless in the sampling frame).

In any event, the place to focus on in understanding why robbery victimization rates are countercyclical most likely is the incentives facing potential robbery perpetrators. Then we could interpret a conclusion that Black victimization rates are especially sensitive to the business cycle to the fact that Black victims are selected disproportionately by Black perpetrators (Cook, 2009), who in turn, are provoked by economic hardships associated with recessions.

### **Criminologists’ Fascination with the Business Cycle**

Every recession brings with it extensive commentary in the media about how deteriorating economic conditions might account for increases in one crime rate or another. Criminologists have helped to fuel this discussion with 150 years of research on the subject. From a policy perspective, this interest might be justified by the use of apportioning credit or blame for observed crime fluctuations. If crime is observed to increase during a recession, and recessions are known to *cause* crime to increase, then the police chief will have a useful alibi for why he should keep his job. The link between the business cycle and crime also might be useful in *forecasting* crime rates and budgeting accordingly, but that only would be true if the business cycle could be forecasted accurately.

Another rationale for studying the macroeconomics of the crime rate is as a grand test for a common hypothesis concerning criminal behavior, namely that crime is a substitute for legitimate opportunity. In this view, just as criminals are drawn disproportionately from those with low incomes and poor employment prospects, so crime rates should increase in response to an across-the-board reduction in licit economic opportunity that occurs during a recession. The scientific problem is that the business cycle is far from a controlled experiment. As discussed, at the same time that recessions reduce legitimate opportunity, they also bring a broad range

of other changes, some of which are expected to *reduce* crime. So if, as I believe, *no* consistent relationship exists between the business cycle and either homicide or aggravated assault, then it does not contradict the belief that better job opportunities will tend to reduce crime—if other variables are held constant. In reality, the business cycle is so pervasive in its effects on society that virtually nothing is held constant.

## References

- Bonger, Willem Adriaan. 1916. *Criminality and Economic Conditions*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company.
- Bushway, Shawn D., Philip J. Cook, and Matthew Phillips. 2010. *Youth Crime and Violence Over the Business Cycle*. Unpublished draft, Duke University, Durham, NC.
- Cook, Philip J. 2007. *Paying the Tab: The costs and benefits of alcohol control*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Cook, Philip J. 2009. Robbery. In (Michael H. Tonry, ed.), *Oxford Handbook on Crime and Public Policy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cook, Philip J. and Gary A. Zarkin. 1985 Crime and the business cycle. *Journal of Legal Studies*, 14: 115–128.
- Lauritsen, Janet L. and Karen Heimer. 2010. Violent victimization among males and economic conditions: The vulnerability of race and ethnic minorities. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Paternoster, Raymond and Shawn D. Bushway. 2001. Theoretical and empirical work on the relationship between unemployment and crime. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 17: 391–408.
- Sellin, Thorsten. 1937. *Research Memorandum on Crime in the Depression*. Social Science Research Council Bulletin No. 27. New York: Social Science Research Council.
- Thomas, Dorothy Swaine. 1927. *Social Aspects of the Business Cycle*. New York: Knopf.
- Van Kan Joseph. 1903. *Les Causes économiques de la criminalité*. Paris: Storck.

**Philip J. Cook** is ITT/Sanford Professor of Public Policy, Economics, and Sociology at Duke University. He served as director and chair of Duke's Sanford Institute of Public Policy from 1985-89, and again from 1997-99. Cook is an honorary Fellow in the American Society of Criminology and in 2001 was elected to membership in the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences.



## POLICY ESSAY

### VIOLENT VICTIMIZATION AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

# Questions about the relationship of economic conditions to violent victimization

**Kenneth C. Land**

**Hui Zheng**

*Duke University*

Lauritsen and Heimer (2010, this issue) conducted an analysis of male race/ethnic group-specific (Latino, non-Latino Black, and non-Latino White) trends in serious, nonfatal violent crime victimization using National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) data from 1973 through 2005. They note that research has shown that Blacks and Latinos have been at greater risk of financial hardship during economic downturns. Then they state that if significant declines in the economy are associated with increases in violence, crime trends disaggregated by race and ethnicity should show greater changes among minorities during periods of economic downturn.

The basic finding of the article is consistent with this hypothesis. Although evidence does indicate declines in the long-term trends in rates of violence for all groups, trends for Latino and Black males are similar and, for the most part, follow changes in Lauritsen and Heimer's (2010) chosen measure of change in the national economy; namely, changes in the Index of Consumer Sentiment (ICS). For White males, however, the basic finding is that fewer fluctuations coincide with changes in economic conditions as measured by the ICS. Based on this analysis, Lauritsen and Heimer conclude that future research (a) should study criminal justice and other moderating factors of the relationship between economic conditions and victimization using group-specific measures of violence to not mask important group differences, and (b) expand these analyses to consider the potential effects of perhaps new and innovative government policies that are intended to reduce the effects of poverty and unemployment on violence.

We believe Lauritsen and Heimer (2010) did a good job in piecing together and in estimating the race/ethnic-specific male violent victimization rates from the NCVS data. Generally, their findings regarding differences among the groups and trends therein make sense in light

Direct correspondence to Kenneth C. Land, Box 90088, Department of Sociology, Duke University, Durham, NC 27708 (e-mail: kland@soc.duke.edu); Hui Zheng, Box 90088, Department of Sociology, Duke University, Durham, NC 27708 (e-mail: huizheng@soc.duke.edu).

of other criminological research. We also cannot take issue with the policy recommendations in the article. We do, however, have three questions regarding some aspects of Lauritsen and Heimer's empirical conclusions and a few additional minor observations.

### **Group Differences: Should We Use Absolute or Relative Scales?**

In Figure 3 of their article, Lauritsen and Heimer (2010) plot the estimated trends in group-specific serious violent victimization rates and in the ICS. The victimization rates are indexed per 1,000 of the population estimated in each of the calendar years for the respective groups. The annual rates are based on 3-year moving averages that smooth out some of the year-to-year random variation to show the trends over time better. This presentation is sensible given that the rates are based on sample survey data not complete population data.

However, it is not clear from the text of the article whether the ICS estimates of consumer pessimism have been subjected to smoothing procedures. Even if this is the case, the fact is that the ICS also is based on sample survey data with sample sizes considerably smaller than those of the NCVS. This issue accounts at least in part for the visibly more erratic behavior of the ICS data than of the victimization rate data in Figure 3 and the subsequent figures in the article.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it would have been desirable to subject the ICS time series to one to three rounds of moving-average smoothing to pull out its major up-and-down oscillations and trends during the 1973–2005 period. Doing so would reveal more clearly the strong similarity of the pattern of changes in the ICS series to those of the unemployment rate time series in Figure 2 of the article with the ICS series peaking about a year earlier. Lauritsen and Heimer (2010) note this lead-lag relationship, but it would be better to smooth out the ICS series so that it is more visibly evident. A smoothed ICS series also would show a closer correspondence to the male serious violent victimization rate series in Figure 3 of the article.

Based on the visible differences in the group-specific levels of violent crime victimization rates in Figure 3 and subsequent figures, Lauritsen and Heimer (2010) conclude, as noted, that the Black and Latino trends and fluctuations are similar and substantially different from those for White males and also show more sensitivity to the chosen index of changes in economic conditions. Again, however, this conclusion is based on the chosen index for the violent crime rates—rates per 1,000 exposed population. This measure is an *absolute scale* for the group comparisons. However, in addition to graphs based on this absolute scale, a previous version of the article contained a graph displaying the group-specific on a *relative scale*, namely the group-specific standardized scores (i.e., the violent crime victimization rates for each group adjusted for the group-specific means and standard deviations). This graph is reproduced in Figure 1.

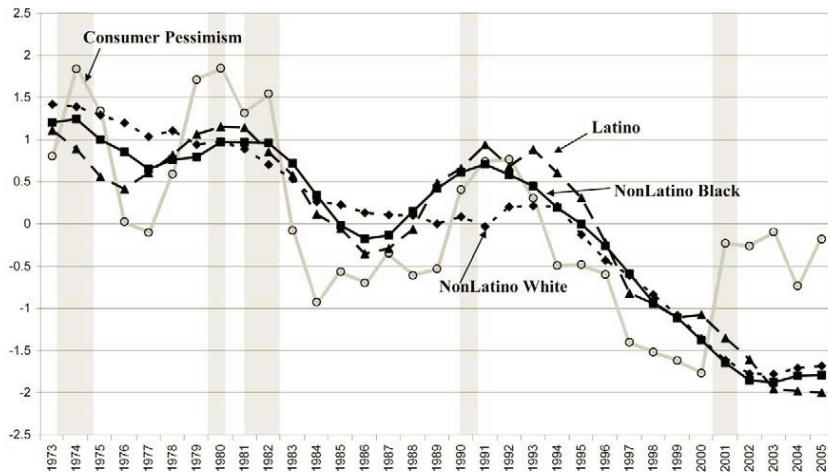
---

1. Complicating matters even more, to test more directly Lauritsen and Heimer's (2010) hypothesis, it would be better to examine whether race/ethnic differences in the trend of violent crime rates are related to changes in group-specific economic conditions. Given the limited sample sizes of the ICS and its highly variable behavior over time, the race/ethnic-specific consumer pessimism time series would have even more stochastic noise, which would make analyses of associations with violent crime victimization rates even more challenging.



FIGURE 1

### Consumer Pessimism and Male Serious Violent Victimization by Race/Ethnicity (Standardized Scores): 1973–2005



Source. An earlier version of Lauritsen and Heimer's (2010) article.

Figure 1 is important for two reasons. First, even without smoothing the ICS time series, for most of the time period from 1973 to 2005, the similarity of changes in the victimization time series to changes in the consumer pessimism series is evident, both in terms of overall secular trends and in terms of ups and downs. Second, and more importantly, the relative scales for the victimization series used in Figure 1 reveal a closer similarity of long- and short-term changes in male violent victimization for all three race/ethnic groups—White, Latino, and Black. The main divergence in the three victimization series also becomes evident, namely the relatively flat series of annual rates for White male victimization in the period from the late-1980s to the early-1990s, a period in which violent crime rates were impacted by the cocaine markets, as Lauritsen and Heimer (2010) note. Prior research cited by Lauritsen and Heimer indicates that these impacts were stronger in central cities and between Latino and Black populations, and this pattern is evident in Figure 1. For the other recessionary periods shown in Figure 1—the mid 1970s, the late 1970s–early 1980s, and the early 2000s—the main impacts on the White male serious violent crime victimization rates are to slow the secular decline across the 33 years spanned by the time series.

So what is the story here? If we use an absolute scale for the male serious violent victimization rates—per 1,000 population at risk—then Lauritsen and Heimer's (2010) conclusions that the White rates show less sensitivity than the Latino and Black rates to national economic recessions most definitely is supported by Figure 3 and the related figures in their article. This is, in part, because of the relatively higher rates of violent victimization for Latinos and Blacks,

which mean that changes therein are less affected by floor effects than are those of White males. On the other hand, if we use a relative scale for the victimization rates—the standardized scores shown in Figure 1 here that take into account the means and standard deviations of the rates for each group—then, for most recessions in the 1973–2005 time period, one would conclude that the deleterious impacts of a national economic downturn on male safety from violent crime are not entirely different. This policy essay is not the place to study these issues in great depth. Suffice it to say that the strong conclusions of Lauritsen and Heimer regarding major race/ethnic group differences in the effects of downturns in the national economy on victimization rates should be tempered.

### **Is the Theory about Victims or Offenders or Both?**

Lauritsen and Heimer's (2010) hypothesis is that Blacks and Latinos are more susceptible to the deleterious effects of an economic downturn than Whites, and so, their violent crime rates might increase more than that of Whites. The main inadequacy of this hypothesis is that it is not built on an articulation of how an economic downturn could affect violent crime through both crime motivation (offender) and crime opportunity (victim exposure) mechanisms. Thus, Lauritsen and Heimer's hypothesis is a reduced-form model that ignores the underlying structural mechanisms. A potential problem related to this model is Lauritsen and Heimer's use of the violent crime victimization rate as the outcome variable for their analyses. This setup does not create problems when the effect of an economic downturn on the gross violent crime victimization rate is studied. But, in studying the effect of an economic downturn on group-specific violent crime, the use of victimization rates involves the unarticulated assumption that victims mostly are attacked by offenders of the same race/ethnicity.

If Lauritsen and Heimer (2010) do not assume victims are attacked mostly by offenders with the same race/ethnicity, then the hypothesis has a problem. Without a fully articulated theory of how economic recessions affect both race/ethnic-specific crime motivation and crime opportunity, it is not theoretically clear why Blacks and Latinos' violent *victimization* rates might rise more than Whites' in an economic downturn. As shown here in Figure 1, Blacks, Latinos, and Whites do not exhibit big differences in trends of violent victimization rates on a relative scale. But we cannot rule out the possibility that Blacks and Latinos' violent *offender* rates might track more closely changes in economic condition than Whites' on both absolute and relative scales.

### **Which Index of the National Economy to Use?**

As noted, Figure 1 shows the similarity of changes in the group-specific male serious violent crime victimization rates to changes in the national economy for most of the time period 1973–2005. But the figure also contains evidence of the divergence of changes in consumer pessimism from those in male violent victimization in the years 2001–2005. Lauritsen and Heimer (2010) state, "The patterns also suggest that the association between changing economic conditions and male victimization trends might have weakened in recent years." The problem with this statement

is that it presumes that Lauritsen and Heimer's chosen measure of economic conditions—the consumer pessimism/ICS scale—is an adequate measure of “changing economic conditions.”

Most observers would agree that the consumer pessimism scale in fact is a leading indicator of fluctuations in the national economy. It also is an indicator that is somewhat erratic. But the following questions remain: Is the consumer pessimism scale an adequate indicator of the national economy? And does this scale have a consistent relationship to male violent victimization rates? But has the relationship between “economic conditions” and male violent crime victimization really changed? Or is it just that the relationship of victimization trends to the chosen indicator of economic conditions that might have changed?

To explore this question, consider another time-series indicator of changes in the national economy plotted by Lauritsen and Heimer (2010) in Figure 2, namely the unemployment rate. More than 20 years ago, Cantor and Land (1985; see also Cantor and Land, 2001; Land, Cantor, and Russell, 1995) developed a theoretical model of how levels of the unemployment rate, as an indicator of system activity or the circulation of people and goods (and thus of the distribution of crime opportunities), and changes or first differences in the unemployment rate, as an indicator of changes in the population distribution of levels of crime motivation, could articulate with fluctuations or changes in reported crime rates as measured by the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR). Suffice it to say that the Cantor–Land model subsequently has been subjected to much empirical replication and critical analysis. Generally, its hypotheses have been found to hold more strongly for UCR property crime rates than for violent crime rates. Alternatives to unemployment rates for the analysis of the effects of the economy on crime that have been put forward in recent years include the Gross State Product (Arvanites and DeFina, 2006) and the consumer pessimism/ICS scale (Rosenfeld, 2009; Rosenfeld and Fornango, 2007;).

All prior empirical applications and assessments of the Cantor–Land model have used UCR rates as the outcome measures of crime. Thanks to the good work of Lauritsen and Heimer (2010), the time series of male violent victimization rates that they have calculated for the period 1973–2005 now can be used. This, of course, requires a separate piece of research. But some tantalizing, approximate illustrative results can be reported here. Specifically, because the precise numerical values of the group-specific annual violent crime rates calculated by Lauritsen and Heimer were not available, we approximated them to integral values from the non-Latino Black male serious violent victimization rate time series graphed in Lauritsen and Heimer's Figure 3.<sup>2</sup> To eliminate the effects of the linear downtrend in the series and to produce a stationary time series, we took first differences. Because the rates were approximate only to integral values, we smoothed the first-differenced time series by applying a 3-point moving average.<sup>3</sup> We then accessed the national unemployment rate time series, mean-centered the series, and took its first differences.

2. If the precise numerical estimates of the victimization rates were available, then similar analyses could be done for the Latino and White male victimization time series as well. The results reported here are only approximate and illustrative.
3. Two-point moving averages were applied to the initial and final values of the time series.

Using the smoothed, first-differenced non-Latino Black male violent victimization rate time series as the outcome variable, and following Cantor and Land (1985), we estimated time-series regression models using the unemployment rate and its first differences as the explanatory variables. For comparison purposes, we also estimated a similar model using the consumer pessimism scale time series and its first differences as explanatory variables. For both analyses, we controlled for the autoregressive correlations in the error terms of the regression models. The estimated coefficients of the models, their standard errors and *t* ratios, and summary statistics are given in Table 1.

TABLE 1

**Estimated Coefficients and Summary Statistics for Unemployment and Consumer Pessimism Scale Time-Series Regression Models of Smoothed First-Differenced non-Latino Black Male Violent Crime Victimization Rates, 1974–2005**

Explanatory Variable	Cantor–Land Model Estimated Coefficients (Standard Errors) [ <i>t</i> Values]	Consumer Pessimism Scale Model Estimated Coefficients (Standard Errors) [ <i>t</i> Values]
Intercept	–1.04 (.81) [–1.28]	–1.05 (.53) [–1.98]
Unemployment rate	–.55 (.25) [–2.19]	—
First differences of the unemployment rate	.41 (.21) [1.96]	—
Consumer pessimism scale	—	–.04 (.03) [–1.30]
First differences of the consumer pessimism scale	—	–.01 (.03) [–.21]
Autoregressive error term correlation coefficients	–.80 (.11) [–7.06]	–.65 (.14) [–4.52]
BIC statistic	102.86	107.62
total $R^2$	.72	.67
regression $R^2$	.16	.10

According to the Cantor and Land (1985) model, the levels of unemployment should display a negative relationship with fluctuations in crime rates, as a higher unemployment rate is indicative of lower levels of system activity and thus of crime opportunities. However, fluctuations in the unemployment rate (as measured by first differences) should display a positive relationship with crime rates, as a positive first difference is indicative of shifts upward in the population distribu-

tion of criminal motivation. Examining the estimates for this model in Table 1, it is shown that the estimated regression coefficients for the unemployment rate and its first differences indeed display the expected negative and positive algebraic signs. Both coefficients also are statistically significant. By comparison, neither the levels of the consumer pessimism scale time series nor its first differences have a statistically significant estimated coefficient. The Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) and the *R*-square summary fit statistics corroborate that the Cantor–Land model fits better to the violent victimization rate outcome variable.<sup>4</sup>

Again, what is the story here? These approximate and illustrative estimates indicate that Lauritsen and Heimer's (2010) conclusion that the relationship between economic conditions and male violent crime victimization rates has weakened in recent years might be more a function of Lauritsen and Heimer's chosen index of economic conditions than of the relationship itself. That is, the weakening might pertain to a break in the relationship of the consumer pessimism scale to male violent victimization rather than of the relationship of the latter to economic conditions.

## Conclusion

One cannot argue with Lauritsen and Heimer's (2010) policy recommendation that we should study the impacts of criminal justice and other moderating factors of the relationship between economic conditions and victimization using group-specific measures of violence to not mask important group differences. It always is good to make group comparisons and study them. However, some similarities in the effects of economic conditions on male violent crime victimization rates among White, Latino, and non-Latino Black groups should be recognized as well. More fully articulating the race/ethnic-specific crime opportunity and crime motivation mechanisms through which race/ethnic-specific economic conditions affect race/ethnic-specific violent crime could help to clarify these effects. And based only on analyses using the consumer pessimism scale, it might be premature to conclude that the effect of economic conditions on male violent crime victimization rates has weakened in recent years. Rather, it is likely that this relationship will remain robust well into the future.

## References

- Arvanities, Thomas M. and Robert H. DeFina. 2006. Business cycles and street crime. *Criminology*, 44: 139–164.
- Cantor, David and Kenneth C. Land. 1985. Unemployment and crime rates in the post World War II United States: A theoretical and empirical analysis. *American Sociological Review*, 50: 317–332.
- Cantor, David and Kenneth C. Land. 2001. Unemployment and crime rate fluctuations: A comment on Greenberg. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 17: 329–342.

4. To the best of our knowledge, this application is the first of the Cantor–Land model to time series of victimization rates as opposed to official reported crime rates.

- Land, Kenneth C., David Cantor, and Stephen T. Russell. 1995. Unemployment and crime rate fluctuations in the post-World War II United States: Statistical time-series properties and alternative models. In (John Hagan and Ruth D. Peterson, eds.), *Crime and Inequality*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Lauritsen, Janet L. and Karen Heimer. 2010. Violent victimization among males and economic conditions: The vulnerability of race and ethnic minorities. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Rosenfeld, Richard. 2009. Crime is the problem: Homicide, acquisitive crime, and economic conditions. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 25: 287–306.
- Rosenfeld, Richard and Robert Fornango. 2007. The impact of economic conditions on robbery and property crime: The role of consumer sentiment. *Criminology*, 45: 735–769.

---

**Kenneth C. Land** is the John Franklin Crowell Professor of Sociology and Demography at Duke University. He is a fellow of the American Society of Criminology. His research interests are in the development of mathematical and statistical models and methods for substantive applications in demography, criminology, and social indicators/quality-of-life studies. Known in criminology for his work on unemployment and crime rate fluctuations, structural covariates of crime rates, and finite mixture models of delinquent/criminal careers, he is the author or co-author of more than 150 articles, chapters, and books.

**Hui Zheng** is a Ph.D. candidate in sociology at Duke University. His research interests pertain to the application of cross-disciplinary perspectives to study crime, demography, health, and aging. His current research projects include examining the deterrence effect of executions, the effect of income inequality on health, trends in health disparities, heterogeneity in the Strehler and Mildvan model of aging and mortality, as well as medicalization.

## POLICY ESSAY

---

### VIOLENT VICTIMIZATION AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

# Economic conditions and racial/ ethnic variations in violence

## Immigration, the Latino paradox, and future research

**Ramiro Martinez, Jr.**

*Florida International University*

Considering the current volatile economic climate amidst persistent racial and ethnic disparities in violence victimization, the study of race and violent crime as well as the study of economic conditions and violence are clearly important contemporary research areas (see Peterson and Krivo, 2005). Indeed, pioneering scholars stressed the need to consider race along with economic conditions a reminder that race and crime studies have long been intertwined with poverty and employment research (see Du Bois, 1996 [1899]). The race and crime research literature has produced valuable information on racial disparities in violent crime and how economic factors influence racial variations in violence especially between Blacks and Whites (Peterson and Krivo, 2005). However, national-level studies of race, economic conditions, and violence usually are cross-sectional, ignore Latinos (the largest ethnic minority group in the nation), and focus almost exclusively on the role of economic disadvantage on macrolevel crime (see Martinez, 2002). Despite the gap in the literature on Latino nonlethal violence and recent declines in the economy, researchers have yet to link these factors when examining recent reductions in violent crime.

Lauritsen and Heimer (2010, this issue) make a substantial contribution to the race/ethnicity/economic conditions literature by analyzing National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) violence data disaggregated by race (non-Latino whites, non-Latino Blacks, and Latinos) during the 1973 to 2005 period, and in doing so, they link the race and ethnicity findings to swings in the economy. As reported by Lauritsen and Heimer, declines in the economy are linked to consumer pessimism and, in turn, to violent crime trends for Latino and Black males. In sum, the impact of changes in economic conditions on changes in Black and Latino violence are potentially ominous when policies designed to alleviate impoverished conditions, unemploy-

---

Direct correspondence to Ramiro Martinez, Jr., Florida International University, Department of Criminal Justice, PCA Second Floor, University Park, 11200 SW 8th Street, Miami, FL 33199 (e-mail: martinra@fiu.edu).

ment, and educational attainment are ignored.<sup>1</sup> The findings provide a platform that I will use to propose future research on Latino violence, including examining the consequences of the increase in the Latino population across the nation.

### **The Role of Race and Ethnicity in Violent Crime Research**

The recent growth of the Latino population across the country provides academics with the opportunity to expand the race and crime literature. Although more Latinos should mean more questions on the extent and causes of Latino violence (Martinez, 1996), there has not been a pronounced surge in Latino violence research. One reason for the exclusion of Latinos in the literature is a claim that “ethnicity” data (for example “Latino/Hispanic” or “not Latino/Hispanic”) are missing from official police reports, which means that information is nonexistent. Yet Lauritsen and Heimer (2010) move beyond police data and refine and reconstruct NCVS “race” categories. This claim is important because it allows them to analyze the level of violent crime victim data over several decades, and their results demonstrate clearly the importance of examining Latinos separately from non-Latino Whites and Blacks. Moreover, the significance of excluding Latinos should not be overlooked because the findings remind criminologists that “White” victim data are confounded with “Latino” when ethnicity is not considered and that studies of “Black” or “White” violent crime both are inaccurate indicators of the racial/ethnic composition of the country and no longer capture the racial and ethnic victim variation in the United States.<sup>2</sup> I would take this a step further and note that it is no longer acceptable to include “percent Hispanic” as an independent variable in macrolevel research and pretend that somehow Latino violence has been incorporated into the analysis (Martinez, 2002).

Nevertheless, Lauritsen and Heimer (2010) also contribute to the race and crime literature by linking the Latino experience to changing national economic conditions, which is extremely beneficial to criminology researchers. In a forthcoming paper (see Martinez, Stowell, and Lee, 2010), we note that researchers in health, mental health, and education have spent years touting the “immigrant paradox” of high poverty combined with better than expected life outcomes (cf. Rumbaut, 1999). But criminology and criminal justice researchers are just starting to value the many ways in which contemporary immigration has strengthened institutions of social control, fostered economic development, and sparked a revival of previously high-crime inner-city neighborhoods over a long period of time (see Ousey and Kubrin, 2009; Stowell, Messner, McGeever, and Raffalovich, 2009). Our findings explore the effects of immigration on neighborhood-level homicide trends in the city of San Diego, California, using a combination of racially/ethnically disaggregated homicide victim data and community structural indicators

- 
1. For more on longitudinal studies on Latinos, educational segregation, educational inequality, and gangs, see Telles and Ortiz (2008).
  2. This is not to suggest that “Latinos” are uniformly “White” at least according to U.S. racial categories and definitions. Many cities have large proportions of “Black” Latinos or Afro-Caribbean residents (Logan and Deane, 2003). Most Latinos are of Mexican origin and probably “Mestizo” origin. For historical foundation, see Laura E. Gómez’s (2007) work in the “Mexican American Race.”



collected for three decennial census periods. Consistent with the immigrant paradox thesis, the results show that the increased size of the foreign-born population *reduces* lethal violence over time. Specifically, we find that neighborhoods with a larger share of immigrants have fewer total, non-Latino White, and Latino homicide victims.

I am reminded of the “immigrant effect” because Lauritsen and Heimer (2010: Figures 3, 4, 6, and 7) demonstrate that violence fell uniformly across the three largest racial/ethnic groups. Absent from the research by Lauritsen and Heimer is a discussion of the decline in Latino violence over a period of intense immigration across the country. The NCVS victim data demonstrate that Latino nonlethal violence decreased despite numerous reasons why it should have increased (Martinez, 2002). Moreover, the negative or null effect of immigration on crime is in line with that of recent and forthcoming longitudinal articles (see Martinez et al., 2010; Ousey and Kubrin, 2009; Stowell et al., 2009). Of course, Lauritsen and Heimer do not measure this issue directly but the Latino nonlethal violence decrease is in line with the Latino homicide decline (Lee and Martinez, 2009)

The findings by Lauritsen and Heimer (2010) also remind me that the stream of immigrants currently reshaping the United States is no longer primarily of European origin. The racial/ethnic/immigrant composition of many neighborhoods has grown increasingly diverse, and the Mexican border has supplanted Ellis Island as the predominant entry point into the nation. Although this transformation is well documented by sociologists and historians, we still know little about the causes and consequences of immigration on violent crime in a contemporary social context at the macrolevel, individual level, or multilevel context. Moreover, research has yet to quantify whether the impact of shifting levels of immigration over time disrupts border communities as many politicians and pundits speculate (see Martinez, 2002: 1–31 for a review). Forthcoming research suggests that is not the case.

The Latino paradox has been mentioned because recent research indicates that immigrants, as well as Latinos and Asians regardless of nativity status, fare better than expected on a host of social and economic factors, including violent crime rates, than native-born African Americans with similarly high levels of disadvantage (see Martinez and Lee, 2000: 486; Sampson and Bean, 2006: 20). For example, of the three largest racial/ethnic groups in the United States, overall homicide rates are highest for Blacks, followed by Latinos and then by Whites, and there are similarities and differences in predictors of homicide especially at the community or census tract level (Peterson and Krivo, 2005). This pattern, again, has prompted some researchers to conclude “immigrants and Latinos are less violent, even more so when they live in concentrated immigrant areas” (Sampson and Bean, 2006: 21). By extension, we can now add that more Latinos mean less nonlethal Latino male violence over a long period of time.

### **Future Research on the Consequences of Latino Growth**

Undocumented Latinos are now targeted by local and federal agencies across the nation, and such actions create the potential for more conflict among Latinos, the police, and criminal justice agencies. The emergence of anti-immigrant laws or ordinances aimed at preventing “illegals” from securing housing or punishing business owners for employing the undocumented have proliferated in many places along with initiatives encouraging local police to search for “illegals” or ask about legality status, an issue noted typically in the federal sphere of influence. One consequence of Latino growth is that anti-immigrant or Latino initiatives are increasing, and all immigrants and Latinos are singled out by politicians, the media, and authorities and are presumed illegal until proven otherwise (Rodríguez, Sáenz, and Menjívar, 2008).

This topic is important to examine given the growing number of citizens and communities pursuing harsher punitive measures for immigration offenses, such as the recently passed Arizona SB 1070 (2010) legislation that compels local police officers to investigate, detain, and arrest people for perceived immigration violations based on a “reasonable suspicion” that he/she was in the country illegally. There is concern that SB 1070 will be implemented without the benefit of proper training, will exacerbate racial profiling, and even may raise concerns about the prolonged detention of citizens and legal residents who look “illegal” but are not carrying documents establishing legality. This type of legislation will, in my opinion, single out Latinos, force them to demonstrate citizenship in the guise of “securing” the border, and will even accelerate attempts to seek deportation for minor or civil offenses even for those attached to native-born Americans in blended families. The impact of legislation to prevent immigration and increased policing on the border is bound to influence criminal justice policy profoundly for the foreseeable future.

Along these lines, another useful approach would construct an outcome that examines places where local police engage in federal immigration activities and enforce immigration laws through the investigation, apprehension, and detention of undocumented immigrants known as the “287(g)” program, a clause in the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (Khashu, 2009). This agreement allows local police officers to perform federal immigration law enforcement functions including using federal databases to check the immigration status of individuals and to process them for deportation hearings when necessary. Most police departments have not rushed to assume federal responsibility, but some are enforcing immigrant-status violations actively (see Decker, Lewis, Provine, and Varsanyi, 2009). What impact, if any, did these strategies have on local crime?

Yet another look at the unanticipated consequences of Latino growth suggests a possible research plan that emanates from the erroneous and negative stereotypes of immigrants. One possibility is to analyze criminal reactions to Latinos by examining anti-Latino hate crimes at the county or place level. Police agencies at the municipal or place level reported that the number of hate crimes against Latinos increased by 36% between 2003 and 2006; this increase in hate crimes coincides with the growth of the anti-immigrant legislation across the country

(see McDonald, 2009). What gave rise to the growth in reported anti-Latino hate crimes at the local level? Was it the growth of Latinos? Did enforcement of harsher legislative policies play a role? One plan is to create a measure that taps legislative reactions to Latino growth and to construct an index based on immigration-related local ordinances. These studies could include cities or counties that have attempted to pass legislation regulating immigration through local housing ordinances barring apartment rentals to unauthorized immigrants, restrictions on granting local services to immigrants, attempts to prevent immigrant children from attending school, efforts to restrict employing undocumented immigrants, and the adoption of English as the official language of the local governments (see Esbenshade, 2007). In the absence of federal immigration reform, local governments have filled the void by proposing or adopting ordinances in at least 104 cities and counties in 28 states that attempt to target, control, and restrict undocumented immigration (Olivas, 2007). These ordinances encompass an array of restriction issues, but I contend they all symbolize local reactions to the growth of immigrant Latinos and concern about this perceived threat.

## Discussion

Lauritsen and Heimer (2010) suggest that that over time, the increase in unstable economic conditions means more violence among Black and Latino males. Their article fills an enormous void in the literature because it explores racial and ethnic variations in nonlethal violence or types of violent crime other than homicide. Although lethal violence is an enduring public concern, some of the anti-immigrant rhetoric and legislation is directed toward fear of criminal victimization in areas with new and old Latino populations. This concern has unanticipated consequences including the mentioned policy initiatives such as Arizona's anti-immigrant law and increased police powers that are based largely on erroneous and negative stereotypes of immigrants. These actions are based in part on erroneous images that associate "more immigrants with more crime," rather than sound empirical evidence and associated factual experience that this essay recommends. The authors also demonstrate convincingly that violence has declined across time, which includes Latinos (a population that has significantly more immigrants than non-Latino Whites and Blacks). By singling out immigrants, and Latinos by extension, there is a possibility of continuing to fuel flawed public policies that increase the problems they aimed to reduce while ignoring empirically based policy options that are indeed needed and useful.

## References

- Decker, Scott H., Paul G. Lewis, Doris M. Provine, and Monica W. Varsanyi. 2009. On the frontier of local law enforcement: Local police and federal immigration law. In (William F. McDonald, ed.), *Immigration, Crime and Justice. Sociology of Crime, Law, and Deviance*, vol. 13. Bingley, U.K.: Emerald.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. 1996 [1899]. *The Philadelphia Negro*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Esbenshade, Jill. 2007. *Special Report on Division and Dislocation: Regulating*

- Immigration through Local Housing Ordinances*. Washington DC: Immigration Policy Center.
- Gómez, Laura E. 2007. *Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race*. New York: New York University Press.
- Khashu, Anita. 2009. *The Role of Local Police: Striking a Balance Between Immigration Enforcement and Civil Liberties*. Washington, DC: Police Foundation. Retrieved May 9, 2010 from <http://policefoundation.org/indexStriking.html>.
- Lauritsen, Janet L. and Karen Heimer. 2010. Violent victimization among males and economic conditions: The vulnerability of race and ethnic minorities. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Lee, Matthew T. and Ramiro Martinez, Jr. 2009. Immigration reduces crime: A review of the emerging scholarly consensus. In (William F. McDonald, ed.), *Immigration, Crime and Justice. Sociology of Crime, Law, and Deviance*, Vol. 13. Bingley, U.K.: Emerald.
- Logan, John R. and Glenn Deane. 2003. Black Diversity in Metropolitan America. Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research, August 15, 2003.
- Martinez, Ramiro, Jr. 1996. Latinos and lethal violence: The impact of poverty and inequality. *Social Problems*, 43: 131–146.
- Martinez, Ramiro, Jr. 2002. *Latino Homicide: Immigration, Violence, and Community*. New York: Routledge.
- Martinez, Ramiro, Jr. and Matthew T. Lee. 2000. On immigration and crime. In (Gary LaFree and Robert Bursik eds.), *Criminal Justice 2000: The Changing Nature of Crime*, Vol. I. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.
- Martinez, Jr., Ramiro, Jacob I. Stowell, and Matthew T. Lee. 2010. Immigration and crime in an era of transformation: A longitudinal analysis of homicides in San Diego neighborhoods, 1980–2000. *Criminology*, 48: 801–834.
- McDonald, William F. 2009. Adding insult to injury: The unintended consequences for immigrants of hate crime legislation. In (William F. McDonald, ed.), *Immigration, Crime and Justice. Sociology of Crime, Law, and Deviance*, vol. 13. Bingley, U.K.: Emerald.
- Olivas, Michael A. 2007. Immigration related state statutes and local ordinances: Preemption, prejudice, and the proper role for enforcement. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 27: 31–33. Retrieved May 9, 2010 from [ssrn.com/abstract=1069121](http://ssrn.com/abstract=1069121).
- Ousey, Graham C. and Charis E. Kubrin. 2009. Exploring the connection between immigration and violent crime rates in U.S. cities, 1980–2000. *Social Problems*, 56: 447–473.
- Peterson, Ruth D. and Lauren J. Krivo. 2005. Macrostructural analyses of race, ethnicity, and violent crime: Recent lessons and new directions for future research. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 31: 331–356.
- Rodríguez, Havidan, Rogelio Sáenz, and Cecilia Menjívar. 2008. Preface. In (Havidan Rodríguez, Rogelio Sáenz, and Cecilia Menjívar, eds.), *Latinas/os in the United States: Changing the Face of America*. New York: Springer.

- Rumbaut, Ruben G. 1999. Assimilation and its discontents: Ironies and paradoxes. In (Charles Hirschman, Philip Kasinitz, and Josh DeWind, eds.), *The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Sampson, Robert J. and Lydia Bean. 2006. Cultural mechanisms and killing fields: A revised theory of community-level racial inequality. In (Ruth D. Peterson, Lauren J. Krivo, and John Hagan, eds.), *The Many Colors of Crime: Inequalities of Race, Ethnicity, and Crime in America*. New York: New York University Press.
- Stowell, Jacob I., Steven F. Messner, Kelly F. McGeever, and Lawrence E. Raffalovich. 2009. Immigration and the recent violent crime in the United States: A pooled, cross-sectional time-series analysis of metropolitan areas. *Criminology*, 47: 889–928.
- Telles Edward E. and Vilma Ortiz. 2008. *Generations of Exclusion: Mexican Americans, Assimilation, and Race*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

### Statutes Cited

Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act, Arizona S.B. 1070 (2010).

**Ramiro Martinez, Jr.** is a professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at Florida International University in Miami, Florida. He is a member of the Racial Democracy, Crime and Justice Network at The Ohio State University and the National Hispanic Science Network on Drug Abuse. His research interests include race/ethnicity/immigration, crime, and the criminal justice system. He received the Texas State University College of Liberal Arts Distinguished Alumni Achievement Award and the Texas State Alumni Association's Alumni Achievement Award in 2009. He is also a past recipient of the American Society of Criminology's Division on People of Color and Crime Coramae Richey Mann Award for outstanding scholarship in the area of race, crime, and justice, the Florida International University Faculty Award for Excellence in Research, and the American Sociological Association Latina/o Section Award for Distinguished Contributions to Research. He is the author of *Latino Homicide: Immigration, Violence and Community* (2002, Routledge) and editor of *Immigration and Crime: Race, Ethnicity, and Violence* (2006, New York University Press).



# POLICY ESSAY

---

## VIOLENT VICTIMIZATION AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

### Inequality by design

#### The connection between race, crime, victimization, and social policy

**Patricia Y. Warren**

*Florida State University*

Criminological research has consistently explored the relationship between race, crime, and victimization (Hindelang, 1978; LaFree, O'Brien, and Baumer, 2006; Lauritsen and White, 2001; Sampson and Wilson, 1995; Steffensmeier and Allan, 1996; Zatz and Rodriguez, 2006). In general, this research finds that Blacks have higher rates of crime and victimization than do Whites, with the rates for Hispanics falling in between the two. As a result, increased scholarly attention has been devoted to understanding the mechanisms that account for these variations (Anderson, 1990; Blau and Blau, 1982; Stewart and Simons, 2006). Most notably, scholars have emphasized the salience of inequality along with economic disadvantage. Inequality is important because it implies that society is socially stratified, such that people are ordered or ranked in relation to one another. Economic disadvantage, however, reflects the cumulative effects of inequality that seem to impact Black and Hispanic citizens most significantly. For example, they are two times as likely as Whites to live in poverty and hold low-skilled and low-wage-earning jobs. In 1998, for example, the weekly earnings differential between Black and White citizens was approximately \$119. For Hispanics, the gap was \$175. By 2008, the earnings gap had slightly widened with differences between Blacks and Whites totaling \$153 and \$213 for Hispanics (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005).

So, what does inequality and economic disadvantage have to do with the relationship between race, crime, and victimization? To date, scholars have demonstrated that economically deprived groups are more likely to be involved in crime and victimization in part because they reside in dangerous communities where resources are insufficient to structure safe environments (Braithwaite, 1979; Cohen and Felson, 1979; Krivo, Peterson, and Payne, 2009; Sampson and Wilson, 1995). In addition, Massey and Denton (1993) suggest that the social isolation that

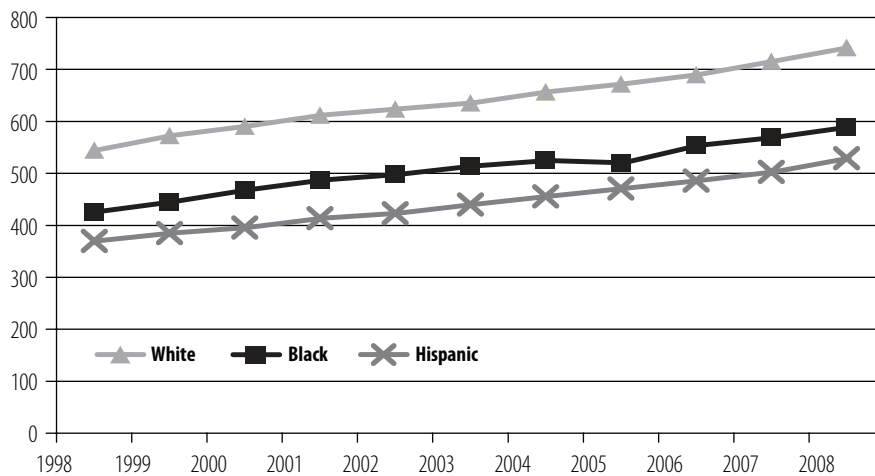
---

Direct correspondence to Patricia Y. Warren, College of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Hecht House, Florida State University, 634 West Call Street, Tallahassee, FL 32306 (e-mail: pwarren@fsu.edu).

results from economic disadvantage leads to structural constraints and cultural adaptations that undermine the social organization and crime control in communities (see also Wilson, 1987, 2006).

**FIGURE 1**

**Weekly Median Earnings by Race and Hispanic Ethnicity, 1998–2008**



Source. Data provided by Labor Force Characteristics by Race and Ethnicity, 2008, Report 1020, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009. Retrieved April 28, 2010 from [http://www.bls.gov/cps/race\\_ethnicity\\_2008.htm](http://www.bls.gov/cps/race_ethnicity_2008.htm).

Although these studies have proven to be invaluable, Lauritsen and Heimer (2010, this issue) present a nuanced idea in which they make a compelling case for devoting greater attention toward understanding how economic disadvantage particularly during recessionary periods is associated with the relationship among race, crime, and victimization. More specifically, this research suggests that the economic inequality experienced by Blacks and Hispanics during recessionary periods exacerbates the economic hardships they already face because they more frequently occupy lower status jobs, which are most vulnerable to cuts during economic downturns.

This research contributes significantly to prior research in this area by situating the connections among race, crime, and economic disadvantage within a broader structural context. The emphasis on recessionary periods demonstrates the significance of economic downturns and how it can burden already economically depressed people. Scholars and policy makers alike must be attentive to these issues to foster reductions in crime and victimization.

### **Inequality, Crime, Victimization, and Social Policy**

Inequality is a consequence of a variety of structural factors in society and can have deleterious effects on individuals who are most burdened by the economic disadvantage that results from it. In 1998, more than one quarter of all Blacks (26%) lived in poverty, which is an improvement



from 1979 when 31% of Blacks were classified officially as poor. The rate of poverty among Hispanics is also staggering, as approximately 21% in 2004 were currently living in poverty in comparison to the 9% of Whites who are classified as poor (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). These persistent patterns of poverty and disadvantage among Blacks and Hispanics have been shown to heighten levels of crime and of violence significantly, in part because they live in disadvantaged communities in which residents find it difficult to control violence through informal and formal mechanisms (Peterson and Krivo, 2005; Pratt and Cullen, 2005). Although it is the case that inequality and economic disadvantage to some degree are inherent to a capitalistic economy, it does not necessarily have to foster social isolation, which contributes to crime and victimization.

Two policy strategies can be employed to buffer the effects of economic disadvantage on crime and victimization among racial minorities. First, given the consistent body of empirical evidence that suggests poverty influences crime rates, there must be greater police presence within the context of these highly disadvantaged neighborhoods. Police presence is needed not only to assist residents in formally controlling the crime and incivilities that exist but also to build cooperative relationships with community members.

Currently, the philosophy of patrolling within high-crime and economically disadvantaged communities is referred to as “zero tolerance.” This policing strategy is viewed often as aggressive and was one of the strategies employed during the “War on Drugs,” which incarcerated Blacks and Hispanics at a rate that far surpassed their baseline population (Harris, 2002).

More broadly, it is important for community residents to view police as serving the interests of their community. Developing a healthy working partnership between police and the community is the essence of the community–policing ideal. One of the best documented examples is Boston’s Ten-Point Coalition, which is a group of African American ministers that began working closely with the police department in the early 1990s to combat youth violence. The major contribution of the coalition was the creation of an “umbrella of legitimacy” for police efforts to prevent and control gang violence (Berrien and Winship, 2002). These ministers accomplished what few police organizations have been able to do. Specifically, they eased the historical hostility that many minority residents felt toward police by building effective and sustainable relations between the police and minority residents.

The second policy strategy is directed at addressing the racial inequities in education. This policy does not have short-term benefits but will have long-term consequences on the life chances of individuals who live in the most economically disadvantaged circumstances. This can be accomplished by federal, state, and local governments, making a consistent social and monetary investment in education. Currently, many state governments spend more revenue on building prisons than they spend on creating school tutorial programs for kids who are most at risk to drop out or fail.

Therefore, local municipalities, along with parents, teachers, and school administrators, must work together collaboratively to reverse the racial gap in school achievement. This task can be accomplished by creating school-based tutorial reading and math programs. These programs

will identify children who are at risk for failure in early education to reduce the achievement gap that is likely to result by the time they enter high school. Haycock (2001) notes that by the end of high school, 8% of all Black and Hispanic students' test scores demonstrate they have skills in reading and mathematics that are equivalent to those of White students in the 8th grade. This kind of racial disparity in school outcomes must be addressed to alleviate the negative consequences on occupational opportunities. Being attentive to the achievement gap among Black, White, and Hispanic students will increase the earnings potential significantly among them, thereby reducing the probability that they will live in poverty or be forced to occupy low-skilled and low-wage-earning jobs. Moreover, the short-term economic investment in education might reduce racial minorities' involvement in crime and victimization, even during recessionary periods.

### Conclusion

Lauritsen and Heimer (2010) contribute significantly to our understanding of the connection between race and victimization by first disaggregating the effects of race and ethnicity across time. By disaggregating these effects, they explored how fluctuations in economic conditions influence victimization rates differentially. Next, the study raised broad questions about the relevance of inequality and economic disadvantage in explaining victimization outcomes. They achieved this by examining specifically how and whether the changing nature of the national economy burdens the most economically disadvantaged populations.

Although Lauritsen and Heimer (2010) conclude that the association between economic conditions and victimization trends may have weakened across time, the observed patterns still provide some evidence that future research must consider how broader changes in the national economy influence the race–victimization relationship. Moreover, this research should revive the conversation about inequality among policy makers. In particular, they should not wait until economically difficult times before they recognize the salience of inequality in limiting the occupational opportunities and overall life chances of certain populations of people. Without policy makers taking such care, we will continue to see the higher rates of crime and victimization among minority populations.

### References

- Anderson, Elijah E. 1990. *Streetwise: Race, Class and Change in an Urban Community*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Berrien, Jenny and Christopher Winship. 2002. An umbrella of legitimacy: Boston's Police Department—ten point coalition collaboration. In (Gary S. Katzmann, ed.), *Securing Our Children's Future: New Approaches to Juvenile Justice and Youth Violence*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Blau, Judith R. and Peter M. Blau. 1982. The cost of inequality: Metropolitan structure and violent crime. *American Sociological Review*, 47: 114–129.
- Braithwaite, John. 1979. *Inequality, Crime and Public Policy*. London, U.K.: Routledge.

- Cohen, Lawrence E. and Marcus Felson. 1979. Social change and crime rate trends: A routine activity approach. *American Sociological Review*, 44: 588–608.
- Harris, David. 2002. *Profiles in Injustice: Why Racial Profiling Cannot Work*. New York: New Press.
- Haycock, Kati. 2001. Helping all students achieve: Closing the achievement gap. *Education Leadership*, 58: 1–15.
- Hindelang, Michael J. 1978. Race and involvement in common law personal crimes. *American Sociological Review*, 43: 93–109.
- Krivo, Lauren J., Ruth D. Peterson, and Danielle C. Payne. 2009. Segregation, racial structure and neighborhood crime. *American Journal of Sociology*, 114: 1765–1802.
- LaFree, Gary, Robert O'Brien, and Eric P. Baumer. 2006. Is the gap between black and white arrest rates narrowing? National trends for personal contact crimes, 1960-2002. In (Ruth D. Peterson, Lauren J. Krivo, and John Hagan, eds.), *The Many Colors of Crime: Inequalities of Race, Ethnicity and Crime in America*. New York: New York University Press.
- Lauritsen, Janet L. and Karen Heimer. 2010. Violent victimization among males and economic conditions: The vulnerability of race and ethnic minorities. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Lauritsen, Janet L. and Norman A. White. 2001. Putting violence in its place: The effects of race, ethnicity, gender and place on the risk for violence. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 1: 37–60.
- Massey, Douglas S. and Nancy A. Denton. 1993. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Peterson, Ruth D. and Lauren J. Krivo. 2005. Macrostructural analyses of race, ethnicity, and violent crime: Recent lessons and new directions for research. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 31: 331–356.
- Pratt, Travis C. and Francis T. Cullen. 2005. Assessing macro-level predictors and theories of crime: A meta analysis. In (Michael H. Tonry, ed.), *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Sampson, Robert J. and William Julius Wilson. 1995. Toward a theory of race, crime and urban inequality. In (John Hagan and Ruth D. Peterson, eds.), *Crime and Inequality*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Steffensmeier, Darrell and Emilie Allan. 1996. Gender and crime: Toward a gendered theory of female offending. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 22: 467–478.
- Stewart, Eric A. and Ronald L. Simons. 2006. Structure and culture in African-American adolescent violence: A partial test of the code of the street thesis. *Justice Quarterly*, 23: 1–33.
- U.S. Census Bureau. 2005. *Household Income Rises, Poverty Rate Declines, Number of Uninsured Up*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce.
- Wilson, William Julius. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass and Public Policy*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Wilson, William Julius. 2006. *There Goes the Neighborhood: Racial, Ethnic, and Class Tensions in Four Chicago Neighborhoods and Their Meaning for America*. New York: Vintage Books.

Zatz, Marjorie and Nancy Rodriguez. 2006. Conceptualizing race and ethnicity in studies of crime and criminal justice. In (Ruth D. Peterson, Lauren J. Krivo, and John Hagan, eds.), *The Many Colors of Crime: Inequalities of Race, Ethnicity and Crime in America*. New York: New York University Press.

---

**Patricia Warren** is an assistant professor in the College of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Florida State University. Her primary research interests include race, class and gender inequality, social control, sentencing, and racial profiling. Her current work examines the intersection of race, ethnicity, age, and gender in accounting for disparities in sentencing.

# EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

---

## PUBLIC CRIMINOLOGIES

### Editorial Introduction to “Public Criminologies”

**Todd R. Clear**, *Senior Editor*  
*Rutgers University*

Criminologists are called on to be relevant to the “real world.” There is no other way to say it. Our students remind us of this, as do our noncriminologist friends as we engage them in casual conversation about our work. Just to say “criminology” to someone is to encounter the expectation that the science will have meaning for practice.

Relevance is a double-edged sword. Joan Petersilia (2008) set up a research office jointly housed in a university and a criminal justice agency, with the express intention that the research carried out by that office be more accessible to the agencies that housed it. At the other end of the spectrum was George L. Kirkham, a criminologist who later became a police officer. His book, *Signal Zero*, (1976) was more of a paean to policing than a serious study, trying to change student perceptions of cop work rather than of policing itself. These approaches are the polar opposite to “relevance,” but they share a common experience: Trying to bring criminology to the real world is not easy.

Paradoxically, although “relevance” is central to our work, it makes us, as a profession, uneasy. The highest award of the American Society of Criminology is set aside to recognize contributions to knowledge, not to practice. Tenure/promotion committees find it ever so much easier to evaluate a candidate’s impact on scholarship rather than on practice. And for every established scholar who advocates for a given new policy, it seems there is an equally established scholar who will argue against it.

Yet when all is said and done, the “call to relevance” for criminology is inescapable. How, then, are we to value the practical significance of criminological work? What weight should we give to the practical implications of knowledge in criminology? What are the costs of taking this orientation in our field?

---

Direct correspondence to Todd R. Clear, School of Criminal Justice, Rutgers University, 123 Washington Street, Newark, NJ 07102 (e-mail: tclear@rutgers.edu).

These questions come under consideration in the lead article by Christopher Uggen and Michelle Inderbitzin (2010, this issue), titled “Public criminologies,” and they are further explored in the series of policy essays.

*Public criminology* is a term used by Uggen and Inderbitzin (2010), rephrasing Michael Buroway, to refer to the call for criminologists to write and conduct studies in a way that engages the crime/justice consumer publics (both those who make crime policy and those who are affected by it) in the meaning of the work. This entails talking *to*, talking *with*, and talking *about* those publics in the production of criminological scholarship. Public criminologists situate their work in the so-called real world, and they orient their productivity to the way in which the “the real world” needs it in order to be able to use it.

Uggen and Inderbitzin (2010) open the article by describing how the taxonomy of sociological practice that Buroway (2005) laid out in his presidential address to the American Sociological Association applies well to the field of criminology. They then go on to describe how particular attributes of criminology—in particular the distinctly public nature of crime policy and those close links of criminology to practitioner applications—support the relevance of public criminology as an idea. They review citations of criminological scholars in the news media as but one of many indications that there is a public hunger for criminologists to help interpret the meaning of science about crime and to interpret crime and justice in the news. They show that the work of some of the founding scholars in our field was deeply connected to a public agenda and broadly consistent with the framework of public criminology. The concluding section of the article identifies some of the problems confronting both the practice of public criminology and the people who embrace that orientation to their work. Some of these problems originate because public criminologists generally do their work from a university or college base, where there is an uneven appreciation of the contribution arising from this work. Some of these problems come from the inherently contentious nature of policy making and community engagement.

Uggen and Inderbitzin’s (2010) article can be perceived as not so much a call for the practice of a “more” public criminology but as a call for a greater recognition of this kind of criminology as legitimate and important within the field. By pressing for a greater understanding of the place of public criminology in the array of orientations within the profession, Uggen and Inderbitzin (2010) hope that the value of public criminology can be enhanced.

Ian Loader and Richard Sparks, whose recent book, *Public Criminology?* (2010), is a detailed exploration of some of these same themes, are cautiously upbeat about the advent of public criminology. In their policy essay (2010, this issue) to Uggen and Inderbitzin, Loader and Sparks revisit the political and social contexts that make the practice of public criminology not only difficult but also important. They describe the invaluable resource a social scientist brings to crime and justice policy: honesty about the evidence and a more thorough understanding of the complexity of the problem. Surely, they point out, honesty and knowledge are essential elements for an improved public policy regarding crime.

Paul Rock (2010, this issue) and Michael Tonry (2010, this issue), writing separate policy essays, are two lauded criminologists who have done a great deal of their work in the public arena. They are less sanguine about the prospects of public criminology, although not necessarily opposed to it as a form of practice. Both bemoan the regrettable nature of contemporary crime policy for its many injustices and its often overwhelming foolishness. They attribute this in large part (with different examples) to the deeply intractable political forces that undergird the creation of crime and justice policy, and to the circumstantial ways in which policy changes occur. Rock adds his own concerns about the ways the criminological enterprise, when it engages the public agenda, are subject to being hijacked by the baser aspects of that agenda.

The two final essayists, Daniel Mears (2010, this issue) and Kenneth C. Land (2010, this issue), accept as largely self-evident the idea that public criminology is an orientation of value. They offer suggestions in support of the endeavor. Mears identifies ways that the most problematic collateral consequences of public criminology can be minimized. Land suggests potential strategies for institutional support for the practice of public criminology.

It would be a misleading reading of these essays as evidence that public criminology “is here to stay.” Clearly, it has always been with us. The question really is as follows: “What shall we make of public criminology?” This is true not just among us criminologists but also among the larger world in which our work occurs.

## References

- Buroway, Michael. 2005. For public sociology: Contradiction, dilemmas and possibilities. *American Sociological Review*, 70: 4–28.
- Kirkham, George L. 1976. *Signal Zero*. Philadelphia: JB Lippincott.
- Land, Kenneth C. 2010. Who will be the public criminologists? How will they be supported? *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Loader, Ian and Richard Sparks. 2010. *Public Criminology?* New York: Routledge.
- Loader, Ian and Richard Sparks. 2010. What is to be done with criminology? *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Mears, Daniel P. 2010. The role of research and researchers in crime and justice policy. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Petersilia, Joan. 2008. Influencing public policy: An embedded criminologist reflects on California prison reform. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 4: 335–356.
- Rock, Paul. 2010. Comment on “Public Criminologies.” *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Tonry, Michael. 2010. “Public Criminology” and evidence-based policy. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Uggen, Christopher and Michelle Inderbitzin. 2010. Public Criminologies. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.

**Todd R. Clear** is Dean of the School of Criminal Justice at Rutgers University. In 1978, he received a Ph.D. in criminal justice from The University at Albany. Clear has also held professorships at Ball State University, Rutgers University, Florida State University (where he was also Associate Dean of the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice), and John Jay College of Criminal Justice (where he held the rank of Distinguished Professor). He has authored 12 books and more than 100 articles and book chapters. Clear has served as president of The American Society of Criminology, The Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, and The Association of Doctoral Programs in Criminology and Criminal Justice. His work has been recognized through several awards, including those of the American Society of Criminology, the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, The Rockefeller School of Public Policy, the American Probation and Parole Association, the American Correctional Association, and the International Community Corrections Association. Published studies list Clear as among the most frequently cited criminologists in America. He was the founding editor of the journal *Criminology & Public Policy*, published by the American Society of Criminology.



# RESEARCH ARTICLE

---

## PUBLIC CRIMINOLOGIES

### Public criminologies

**Christopher Uggen**

*University of Minnesota*

**Michelle Inderbitzin**

*Oregon State University*

#### **Research Summary**

*Public scholarship aspires to bring social science home to the individuals, communities, and institutions that are its focus of study. In particular, it seeks to narrow the yawning gap between public perceptions and the best available scientific evidence on issues of public concern. Yet nowhere is the gap between perceptions and evidence greater than in the study of crime. Here, we outline the prospects for a public criminology, conducting and disseminating research on crime, law, and deviance in dialogue with affected communities. We present historical data on the media discussion of criminology and sociology, and we outline the distinctive features of criminology—interdisciplinarity, a subject matter that incites moral panics, and a practitioner base actively engaged in knowledge production—that push the boundaries of public scholarship.*

#### **Policy Implications**

*Discussions of public sociology have drawn a bright line separating policy work from professional, critical, and public scholarship. As the research and policy essays published in *Criminology & Public Policy* make clear, however, the best criminology often is conducted at the intersection of these domains. A vibrant public criminology will help to bring new voices to policy discussions while addressing common myths and misconceptions about crime.*

---

An earlier draft of this article was presented at the 2006 annual meetings of the American Sociological Association, Montreal. We thank Kim Gardner for research assistance and Howard Becker, Mark Edwards, Sarah Lageson, Heather McLaughlin, and Mike Vuolo for constructive comments. Direct correspondence to Christopher Uggen, Department of Sociology, University of Minnesota, 267 19th Avenue South #909, Minneapolis, MN 55455 (e-mail: [uggen@atlas.socsci.umn.edu](mailto:uggen@atlas.socsci.umn.edu)); Michelle Inderbitzin, Department of Sociology, Oregon State University, 307 Fairbanks Hall, Corvallis, OR 97331 (e-mail: [mli@oregonstate.edu](mailto:mli@oregonstate.edu)).

**Keywords**

*public scholarship, criminologists, policy, history*

The concept of “public sociology,” and public scholarship more generally, has energized and illuminated conversations about what it means to conduct social-science research and the meaning of that research to larger publics. Public scholarship aspires to produce and disseminate knowledge in closer contact with the individuals, communities, and institutions that are the focus of its study. In particular, it seeks to narrow the yawning gap between public perceptions and the best available scientific evidence on issues of public concern. From residents of dangerous neighborhoods to policy makers concerned about the increased costs of incarceration, our publics need high-quality information about the world around them. Nowhere is the gap between perception and evidence greater than in the study of crime and punishment.

Here, we consider the implications of public scholarship for the sociological study of crime, law, and deviance as we outline prospects for a public criminology. As criminology and criminal justice programs have grown and flourished as independent disciplines (Laub, 2005; Loader and Sparks, 2008; Savelsberg and Flood, 2004), so too have the publics with whom academic criminologists are speaking. This expansion brings renewed opportunities to cultivate new audiences and to find innovative ways to bring empirically sound research and comprehensible messages to those diverse publics.

**The Impulse for a Public Criminology**

A sense of justice consciousness often draws scholars to the study of crime, law, and deviance. For some, this consciousness derives from personal encounters with crime and punishment (Irwin, 1970); experience as a client or practitioner in the justice system might spark a sense of outrage or a resolve to bring better data and theory to bear on its operation (Jacobson, 2005). However, in criminology, as in other social sciences, graduate training often seems “organized to winnow away at the moral commitments” that inspired the students’ interest in the first place (Burawoy, 2005a: 14). Knowledgeable and capable students emerge from graduate school with a professional skill set and an orientation equipping them to advance scientific knowledge about crime. Although this training provides much of the expertise needed for responsible public scholarship, it generally emphasizes research questions, methodologies, and scholarly products that might be far removed from the justice issues and public outreach mission that originally drew students to the field.

A public criminology could nurture the passion students bring to justice concerns while contributing to professional, critical, and policy criminology. We envision the following crucial tasks in this regard: (a) evaluating and reframing cultural images of the criminal, which is perhaps the clearest example of public criminology; (b) reconsidering rule making, which has deep roots in critical criminology; (c) evaluating social interventions, which derives from policy criminol-

ogy; and (d) assembling social facts and situating crime in disciplinary knowledge, which most clearly maps onto professional criminology. As consumers of media and concerned community members, criminologists often read the papers or hear the news with a world-weary resignation that other citizens and policy makers fail to grasp important points about, say, the age–crime curve or the costs of incarceration. A public criminology attacks such concerns head-on, aiming both to inform the debate and to shift its terms.

This article is in four parts. We begin with a discussion of the move toward “public sociologies” and critiques of the concept and its implementation. Next we consider the contours or shape of public criminologies by outlining a brief history of criminological work that employs similar conceptions, leading us to a discussion of ongoing efforts in public criminology today. Finally, we conclude by addressing the question of meaning for public criminologists inside and outside the classroom.

## **The Public Sociology Debates**

### *Public Sociology Defined*

It now has been more than 5 years since the annual meetings of the American Sociological Association were organized around the theme of public sociology (Burawoy, 2005a). Although criminologists such as Clifford R. Shaw, John Irwin, and Elliot Currie had advocated public scholarship for a long time, these meetings brought the concept and the debate to the forefront. For Michael Burawoy (2004: 5), the Association’s president that year, the kernel idea was to engage “publics beyond the academy in dialogue about matters of political and moral concern” and to promote “dialogue about issues that affect the fate of society, placing the values to which we adhere under a microscope” (Burawoy et al., 2004: 104). The debate over public sociology is built at least partially on the work of Herbert Gans (1989), another former American Sociological Association president; for Gans, the ideal model was one of the “public intellectual,” applying social scientific ideas and findings to broadly defined social issues and serving as a bridge between academics and the rest of the society.

Burawoy (2005a) offered a two-by-two table to distinguish public sociologies from other sociological work, which is reproduced here as Table 1. In contrast to public sociology, professional sociology and critical sociology primarily are written for academic audiences of professors and graduate students. In contrast to policy sociology, public sociology is “reflexive” rather than instrumental. That is, public sociology is engaged explicitly in dialogue with publics rather than being conducted on behalf of policy actors. Burawoy described a career trajectory in which a scholar might move from one cell to another throughout the course of his or her career. In one typical trajectory, a graduate student enters the field “infused with moral commitment, then suspends that commitment until tenure whereupon he might dabble in policy work and end his career with a public splash” (Burawoy, 2004: 8).

TABLE 1

**Michael Burawoy's (2005) Two-by-Two Table for Sociology**

	Academic Audience	Extra-Academic Audience
Instrumental knowledge	Professional sociology	Policy sociology
Reflexive knowledge	Critical sociology	Public sociology

*Attacks and Defenses*

Burawoy's (2004, 2005b, 2008) call quickly motivated symposia in journals such as *Social Forces*, *The British Journal of Sociology*, and *Theoretical Criminology* while inspiring attacks to "save" sociology from the forces of public scholarship (Deflem, 2006). These critiques generally concern the out-left political agenda of many public sociologists (Moody, 2005; Nielsen, 2004; see also Wilson, 1975), which is a perceived retreat from scientific standards and methods, and the perception that public sociology is ineffectual as organized and practiced (Brady, 2004). For all these reasons, critics fear that public sociology has the potential to undermine the hard-won legitimacy of the social sciences (Moody, 2005; Tittle, 2004). These critical voices rarely advocate a complete retreat from public activities but suggest that social scientists simultaneously wear two hats—one as citizens in participatory democracies and the other as professional social scientists.

With regard to public scholars' political agenda, Burawoy countered that "the 'pure science' position that research must be completely insulated from politics is untenable, since antipolitics is no less political than public engagement" (Burawoy, 2004: 3). Clear (2010: 717) made the point even more strongly, suggesting that "the absence of a scholarly voice on matters often results in bad policy, and those who (knowing better) remain silent must share some of the blame for that policy." In addressing concerns about scientific standards and methods, public scholars have countered that they advocate and conduct rigorous rather than sloppy research and that they have provided a valuable service in attempting to "explain phenomena that news stories can only describe" (Gans, 2002). Importantly, however, public scholars are *not* simply popularizers. As Gans (1989: 7) conceptualized the term, they are "empirical researchers, analysts, or theorists like the rest of us" but distinctive for their breadth of interests and strong communication skills. As for efficacy, public scholarship can aid in uncovering and publicizing harm or inequity without necessarily redressing it, and it might attempt to do so from a value-neutral perspective. The ambitious new call for a national Council of Social Science Advisors (Risman, 2009) reflects a desire to engage public policy issues from the very core of the field.

Public scholarship cuts across the research, teaching, and service roles of academic life. To provide only the barest outline, it means developing research questions in dialogue with affected communities as opposed to, say, "filling potholes" in the professional literature or answering questions defined solely by others (Becker, 2003). It embraces "big ideas" and "basic" research, "basic in the most profound meaning of the term because it tells us about the world of crime and justice in ways that enable us to imagine new and potent strategies for improving justice

and public safety” (Clear, 2010: 714). For teaching, students play a key role as public criminologists’ “first public” (Burawoy, 2004: 6; 2005c); strategies such as service-learning projects and relevant internships help to bring academics and students out of the classroom and into their communities (Aminzade, 2004). In service, public scholars might offer testimony as expert witnesses, conduct research with diverse community organizations, and disseminate their work in local, national, and international media. For its proponents, publicly engaged work thus is consistent with the traditional activities of academic life.

### **Prospects for a Public Criminology**

In describing its historical trajectory, Burawoy argued that U.S. sociology actually began as public scholarship, then became professionalized, and only then engendered critical and policy sociologies (Burawoy et al., 2004: 106). We argue that criminology is following a similar but distinctive progression. As criminal justice spending stretches far beyond the limits of state budgets, vocal public scholars are returning to criminology’s foundations by again emphasizing public outreach, policy engagement, and research that brings unrepresented voices to debates about crime and punishment.

And this trend is not limited to the United States. Paul Wiles advanced the similar argument that criminology in the United Kingdom has “lost the knack of engaging in public debate.” Wiles suggested that without reasoned debate “the press is always likely to slide into simplistic stereotypes and ignore what evidence we do possess” (Wiles, 2002: 248). As such, it becomes the responsibility of public criminologists to translate their findings and their science into terms that the public and the press can interpret and understand easily (Clear and Frost, 2008). In the United States, for a long time, Elliott Currie (1995: 15) has called for criminologists to shift their attention to the sort of agenda that Burawoy and Gans set for public scholarship.

If there’s one task that we as professional criminologists should set for ourselves in the new millennium, it’s to fight to insure that stupid and brutal policies that we know don’t work are—at the very least—challenged at every turn and every forum that’s available to us . . . To some extent, this will mean redefining what the criminologist’s job is. We will need, I think, to shift some emphasis away from the accumulation of research findings to better dissemination of what we already know, and to more skillful promotion of sensible policies based on that knowledge (Currie, 1999: 15).

### *The Distinctiveness of Public Criminology*

Because crime engenders specific fears as well as vague concerns, many publics think about crime and criminology differently than they do about other social phenomena. As Jacobson (2005: 21) argued, “Such visceral reactions on the part of the public and law makers alike set criminal justice apart from other areas of public policy.” Classic studies in the sociology of

deviance provide concepts and tools that help explain the gap between social science evidence on crime and public concerns.

First, crime often sparks “moral panics,” or periods of intense public fear in which concern about a condition dramatically outstrips its capacity to harm society (Cohen, 1972). Examples of such panics abound, but concern over predatory sex offenders, the proliferation of drugs such as methamphetamine, and the possibility of satanic day care centers (Bennett, DiIulio, and Walters, 1996; Glassner, 1999) offer recent examples.

Second, such fears are stoked by moral entrepreneurs (Becker, 1963) with vested interests in manipulating public opinion (Beckett, 1997). The print and broadcast media serve to transmit such messages while acting as powerful independent forces to shape public sentiment. As a consequence, people often have stronger opinions on crime and justice than on much of the subject matter of sociology, economics, and political science (Beckett and Sasson, 2003). Although they might be concerned about unemployment, sexism, or other social problems, these issues rarely incite the ardently contested moral panics that are routine in matters of crime and deviance. Jacobson (2005: 18) offered vivid examples of the impact of high-profile crimes and their link to punitive policies, referring to the abduction and murder of Polly Klaas, which spurred the passage of California’s “three strikes” law, and the murder of 7-year-old Megan Kanka by a twice-convicted child molester, which led to the federal Megan’s Law. Given this “emotional tone for public discourse about crime and punishment” (Garland, 2001: 10; Garland and Sparks 2000), legislators and politicians largely have replaced academics and researchers in influencing media reports and criminal justice policy (Jacobson, 2005). Public criminologists, armed with peer-reviewed evidence, clear points, and plain language, have an important role to play as experts in the realm of crime and justice, giving voice to the accumulated and emerging knowledge in the field. But they also bear an important responsibility to offer research-based contexts on the causes of crime and recommendations for “criminologically justifiable action” (Clear, 2010: 14) as experts, rather than their own knee-jerk political opinions as citizens.

Third, despite its nascent status as a discipline, criminology continues to be distinguished by its interdisciplinarity. Developmental psychologists (e.g., Terrie E. Moffitt), operations researchers (e.g., Alfred Blumstein), economists (e.g., Philip Cook), and sociologists (e.g., Robert J. Sampson) all contribute important professional knowledge to the field of criminology. This interdisciplinarity is both a strength and a weakness; although a wide range of perspectives are represented in the field, criminologists are often at odds, as they do not necessarily share a core theoretical tradition or a common conceptual language (Hagan and McCarthy, 2000; Savelsberg, Cleveland, and King, 2004). Here, too, public criminologists can provide an important service; by disseminating their ideas clearly in public forums, they educate colleagues and students as well as the larger public about their particular area of expertise. In this way, concepts and evidence from new research can cross disciplines more quickly, and professional criminology will gain strength.

Finally, criminology is unusual for its close connection to practitioner-based fields. Although sociology parted ways with social work a century ago (Finckenauer, 2005), academic criminology retains a strong practitioner base. Participants at the annual American Society of Criminology meetings routinely include judges, police officers, and state and national officials. These practitioners provide “reality checks” to combat the scholarly insulation characteristic of other social sciences (Gans, 1989). Moreover, it is not unusual for such practitioners—many with Ph.D.s in criminology and criminal justice—to collaborate closely with academics in research and data collection. In fact, several respected criminologists, including Jerome Miller, Barry Krisberg, and Jeffrey Butts, left positions in academia and practice to devote their full attention to research and improving justice policy. Others, such as Michael Jacobson, have gone the other direction, moving from leadership positions in criminal justice agencies into academia and back again, as head of the Vera Institute of Justice. This close connection to criminal justice makes some variants of public criminology more palatable for professional criminologists than public sociology might be for professional sociologists. Policy work, in particular, is professionally recognized in criminology and often is rewarded as relevant and appropriate.

Just as overlap occurs between public sociology and public criminology, overlap certainly occurs within the areas of professional, policy, critical, and public criminologies. As noted, many scholars will move between and within these four categories throughout their careers. In Table 2, we offer a glimpse into the goals, attractions, and potential pathologies of each variant and identify a few exemplars of each ideal type.

**Professional criminology.** Table 2 offers an annotated variant of Burawoy’s two-by-two table for criminology. The task of professional criminology is to assemble an evidentiary base and to situate crime in disciplinary knowledge. Just like professional sociology, professional criminology derives its legitimacy from its presumed application of scientific methods. Similarly, self-referentiality represents its greatest pathology. Lacking a strong disciplinary core, however, professional criminology sometimes is chided for its “collective amnesia” about its own past and ignorance of new breakthroughs in related disciplines (Laub and Sampson, 1991: 1345). Nevertheless, it builds on well-developed theoretical traditions and an increasingly solid base of empirical evidence.

Daniel S. Nagin’s development of mixture models for describing criminal careers offers an ideal typical example of professional criminology (Nagin, 2005). These methods have inspired a burgeoning literature that is changing the way criminologists view crime (see, e.g., Piquero, 2008), but their impact is largely occurring *within* quantitative criminology or developing in a “separate but equal” fashion that runs parallel to the development of latent mixture models in the social sciences more generally.

Crucial tasks at the nexus of public and professional sociology involve assembling social facts for broader dissemination and conducting research in partnership with a wide range of publics to inform disciplinary scholarship. The former requires the clearheaded reporting of professional knowledge, whereas the latter involves bringing new voices, issues, and concerns to the scientific study of crime and punishment.

**T A B L E 2**

**A Two-by-Two Table for Professional, Policy, Critical, and Public Criminologies**

	<b>Academic Audience</b>	<b>Extra-Academic Audience</b>
<b>Instrumental</b>	Professional criminology: Assembling evidentiary base and situating crime in disciplinary knowledge	Policy criminology: Evaluating social interventions and making evidence-based recommendations
Knowledge	Theoretical/empirical	Concrete
Legitimacy	Scientific norms (methods)	Effectiveness (specific)
Accountability	Interdisciplinary peers and Practitioners	Clients/patrons (government, foundations, and practitioners)
Pathology	Self-referentiality and collective amnesia	Servility (“contract work”)
Politics	Professional self-interest	Policy intervention
Attractions	Careers	Funding (and recognition)
Outlets	Journals and scholarly monographs	Research reports (e.g., NIJ Research in Brief)
Exemplars	Daniel Nagin’s TRAJ models; Laub and Sampson (2003).	Sherman et al., 2008 What Works? CSPV’s Blueprints for Violence Prevention
<b>Reflexive</b>	Critical criminology: Raising questions about rule making, rule breaking, and rule enforcement	Public criminology: Evaluating and reframing cultural images of crime, criminals, and justice
Knowledge	Foundational (crime and justice)	Communicative
Legitimacy	Moral vision (of justice)	Relevance
Accountability	Critical intellectuals (and convict intellectuals)	Designated publics (citizens, victims, and practitioners)
Pathology	Dogmatism (and insularity)	Potential for bias and faddishness (“airport criminologists and homogeneity)
Politics	Internal debate	Public dialogue
Attractions	Values	Influence and attention
Outlets	Journals and monographs	Mass media and trade press
Exemplars	Richard Quinney, Meda Chesney-Lind, Kathleen Daly, Jeffrey Reiman, William Chambliss, and Walter DeKeseredy	Todd Clear, Barry Glassner, James Q. Wilson, and Elliott Currie

*Policy criminology.* Policy criminology involves directly applying criminological theories and methods to efforts to prevent or control crime and delinquency. This entails evaluating social interventions and making evidence-based recommendations to funding agencies. For policy criminology to be most useful, “it needs to be accurate, not just used” (Sherman, 2005: 118). Lawrence Sherman (2005: 118) thus argued that social science is at its “practical best” when it is derived from experimental evidence that points to visibly demonstrable benefits.

Burawoy identified “servility” as the chief pathology of policy sociology, which is likely the case with policy criminology as well. For example, researchers seeking funding from the National Institute of Justice generally must submit proposals within a relatively narrow range of questions identified as important by the agency during the particular funding cycle. Perhaps the most ambitious examples of policy criminology concern the large-scale mobilization by Sherman and colleagues to catalog “what works” (Sherman et al., 1998), the ongoing efforts of the Campbell Collaboration (Farrington and Welsh, 2001) to evaluate experimental evidence



on crime and punishment, the *Blueprints* series by the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, and this peer-reviewed American Society of Criminology journal, *Criminology & Public Policy*. The latter journal now straddles the line between public criminology and policy criminology, publishing accessible cutting-edge research and inviting policy essays from prominent scholars (Clear and Frost, 2008). Along similar lines, a collection of peer-reviewed policy essays were published and disseminated at the 2009 American Society of Criminology meetings (Frost, Freilich and Clear, 2010).

**Critical criminology.** Critical criminology considers foundational questions about the meaning of crime and justice for an academic audience. In doing so, critical scholars emphasize how inequities of power shape the rule-making and enforcement processes that other criminologists might take for granted. For example, some critical criminologists render problematic the definition of crime as a violation of the criminal code, reconceptualizing it as social harm (see, e.g., Quinney, 1977). As with critical sociology, critical criminology is animated by a moral vision, challenging the taken-for-granted assumptions of academics and their publics. It examines the foundations of research programs and aims to make criminology aware of its own biases.

Some variants of critical criminology, however, have moved beyond academic audiences. Convict criminology, for example, is critical criminology written by and for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated persons. Among prisoners, for a long time, the critical press has been viewed as more trustworthy and authoritative about crime than mainstream media or scholarship. Although Burawoy identified dogmatism as the chief pathology of critical sociology, this viewpoint is less likely to be the case in criminology in which many schools of “left realist,” “new criminology,” and structural and instrumental Marxist variants are present. Yet none of these schools have garnered widespread favor within criminology. The following statement by Hayward and Young (2004) on the work of cultural criminology illustrates the point:

Whether we can achieve our goal of derailing contemporary criminology from the abstractions of administrative rationalization and statistical complexity remains to be seen. In the meantime, however, we will continue our work at the margins; for it is here, in these forgotten spaces that the story of crime so often unfolds (2004: 271).

In reconceptualizing notions of crime and justice, critical criminologists consciously distance themselves from mainstream criminology, which might engender insularity and a lively, albeit limited, internal debate.

**Public criminology.** Public criminology helps evaluate and reframe cultural images of crime, criminals, and justice by conducting research in dialogue with communities and in disseminating knowledge about crime and punishment. This work involves listening as well as speaking. For example, a public criminology research project might involve a partnership with a nonprofit or neighborhood group to address the urgent needs of its clients or members while building research capacity in the effected communities. But good public criminology also

advances professional knowledge, as previously unexamined research questions and perspectives are brought to light.

With regard to dissemination, public criminology moves beyond “administrative criminology” (Presdee, 2004) by attempting to give context and meaning to social facts. By virtue of their social networks and close interactions with journalists and policy actors, public criminologists also serve professional criminology. Although the media tend to consult practitioners—chiefs of police, corrections officials, and district attorneys—as the “*real experts*” on crime, public criminologists are often among the first academics to learn of developing stories that might not appear in the scholarly journals for years. They are thus in a position to bring up-to-the-minute information from the field directly to their professional work.

To the extent that public criminology is practiced today, one pathology is the lack of diversity among the voices represented as experts on crime. Feminist researchers and scholars of color, for example, rarely are consulted on general crime trends but instead are relegated to discussions of women and crime or racial minorities and crime.

The potential for bias, uninformed demagoguery and political partisanship represent important pathologies that public criminologists must address head-on. In a devastating 1975 critique, political scientist James Q. Wilson pointed to the dearth of useful criminological knowledge while chiding the pronouncements of left-leaning academic criminologists.

[W]hen social scientists were asked for advice by national policy-making bodies, they could not respond with suggestions derived from and supported by their scholarly work . . . as a consequence such advice as was supplied tended to derive from their general political views as modified by their political and organizational interaction with those policy groups and their staffs (Wilson, 1975: 49).

Although criminological knowledge has advanced greatly since *Thinking about Crime*, the potential for “media hacks” to distort this knowledge remains. Unless they can offer an informed and clear-eyed reading of their own work and the best available criminological knowledge, public criminologists can devolve quickly into “airport criminologists”—so distracted flying around the country as consultants and “experts” that they lose sight of the scientific research base that legitimizes their expertise.<sup>1</sup> Engaging broader publics requires a degree of trust, particularly when we must convey hard truths or confront findings that directly challenge our own preconceptions. Effective public criminology thus demands trust in the knowledge that we produce and absorb, trust in the media’s ability to convey it, and trust in the public’s capacity to grasp its nuances.

In short, a responsible public criminologist is necessarily a good social scientist, attentive to both the scholarly evidence on criminological questions and the broader concerns of affected publics. As Paul Wiles pointed out, “values affect how we go about the business of acquiring knowledge, but that does not mean that our knowledge claims can not be examined against a

---

1. Although he did not endorse the term, Robert J. Sampson invoked “airport criminologist” during a presentation at the annual American Sociological Association meetings in Chicago, 2002.

social world whose externality to us gives an empirical force” (2002: 246). Although perhaps not always defined as such, criminology offers a rich history of public scholarship that lays the groundwork for today’s public criminology.

### **A Great History of Public Criminology**

Public criminology today builds on an important legacy of engaged scholarship. Clifford R. Shaw is perhaps the best exemplar of such work, as reflected in his long-standing attempts to better the circumstances of both individuals and communities (Shaw, 1966). As he formulated social disorganization theory and mapped patterns of ethnic succession in Chicago neighborhoods in the 1920s, Shaw met with communities hard hit by crime and delinquency to learn from residents and to share his findings (for accounts, see Krisberg, 2005; Lundman, 2001: 108). As an important and long-lived institutional response, he founded the Chicago Area Project in an attempt to empower neighborhoods and to help ameliorate the conditions that result in high rates of delinquency (Schlossman and Sedlak, 1983).

An impressive range of public criminology was practiced throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In the early 1960s, Lloyd Ohlin and other American criminologists actively were engaged in the Great Society project as advisors to John F. Kennedy and others (Short, 1975). Implementing and popularizing large-scale antidelinquency projects such as Mobilization for Youth, Ohlin was both a public and a policy criminologist (Krisberg, 2005). At the same time, Edwin Schur, Thomas Szasz, Edwin Lemert, and others writing from a labeling perspective adopted an unconventional sentimentality toward those marked as deviants, raised “big questions” about the foundations of the justice system, and offered the public a new context and perspective for thinking about deviant behavior and societal reactions. Howard Becker clarified these issues for a generation of public scholars when he titled his Society for the Study of Social Problems presidential address “Whose side are we on?” (Becker, 1967).

As noted, conservative political scientist James Q. Wilson worked from a much different set of assumptions and evidence. His deterrence-focused neoconservative vision of public criminology later was carried forward by his student John DiIulio (DiIulio, 1995). From the left, Elliott Currie has written numerous well-received works on crime for a lay audience, including *Confronting Crime* (1985) and *Crime and Punishment in America* (1998). Finally, renegade practitioners such as Jerome Miller, who famously closed juvenile reformatories while serving as corrections commissioner in Massachusetts (Miller, 1996; 1998), have emerged as widely read crime experts as have former chiefs of police, such as Tony Bouza in Minneapolis. These scholars and practitioners perform an important service when they offer alternative visions and concrete examples that challenge current thinking in crime, justice, and punishment. Their visible and authoritative public criminology, in turn, might provide the impetus for others to battle the “power of inertia” (Becker, 1995).

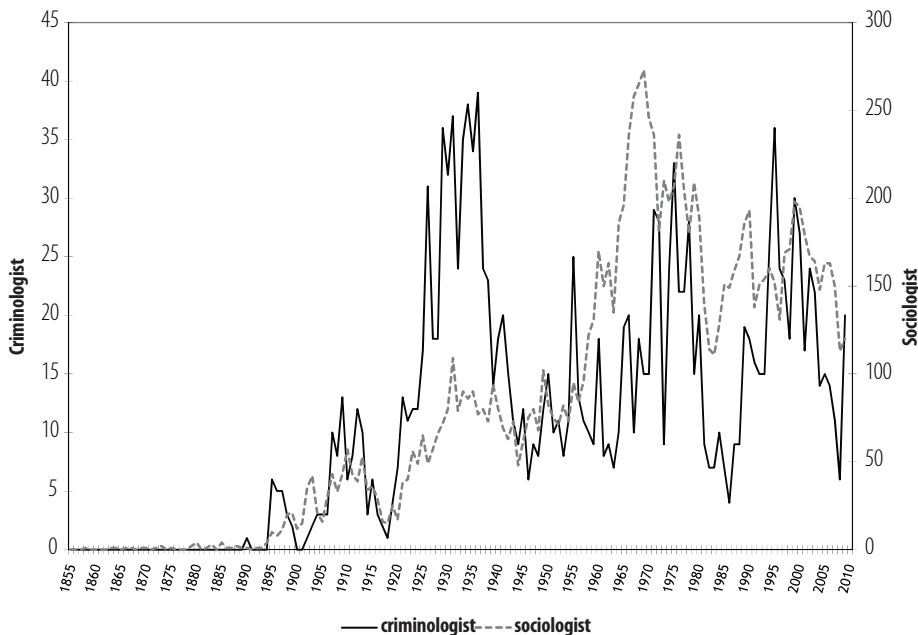
To highlight the importance of the media in defining the cultural image of the criminal (Hayward and Young, 2004) and to provide some sort of historical context for public criminology

in relation to public sociology, we gathered some data on media discussion of criminologists and sociologists. Figure 1 shows the number of *New York Times* articles that mentioned the terms “sociologist” and “criminologist” from 1851 to 2005. The first thing to note from the chart is that neither term appeared with regularity until the 1890s. Second, sociologists have made far more appearances than have criminologists for the past 100 years. The scale of the *y*-axes differs dramatically for the two groups.

The term criminologist was used most often in 1936 during the period of relatively high incarceration during the Great Depression. The stories that year ranged from debates on the use of parole to the opening of recreation centers to prevent delinquency to the execution of Bruno Hauptmann, who was convicted of murder in the famed Lindbergh kidnapping case. The use

**FIGURE 1**

***New York Times* Mentions Criminologists and Sociologists, 1855-2009**



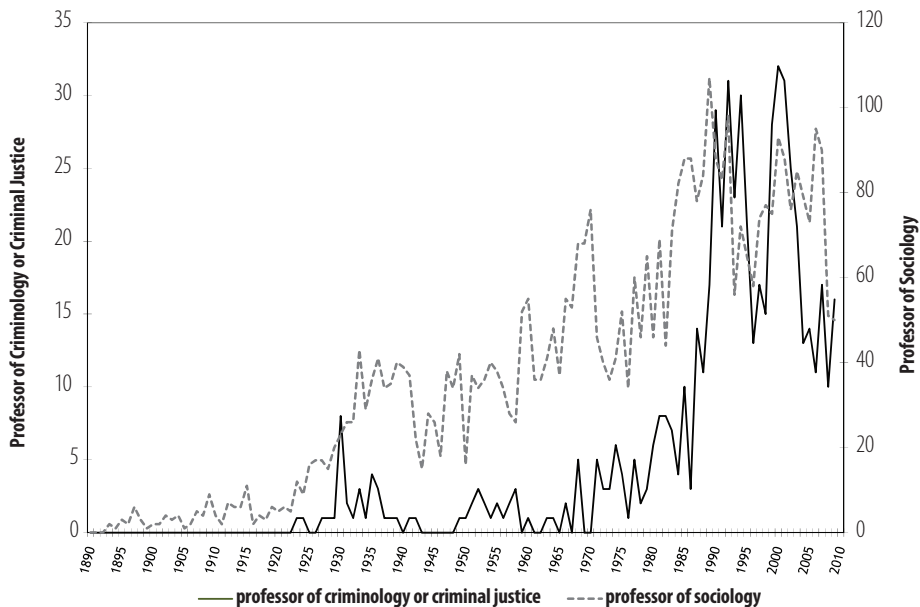
of “sociologist” peaked much later, in the late-1960s period in which American values were being questioned on issues of civil rights, women’s rights, and the Vietnam War. Herbert Gans wrote in 1989 that “the news media pay more attention to us than before,” although only 120 mentions were made in 2009, about the same number of mentions as in 1958. The trend for “criminologist” is erratic in more recent years, peaking during the intense debates surrounding the Clinton crime bill in 1995. We also plotted the mentions of “professor of criminology” or “professor of criminal justice” and “professor of sociology,” as shown in Figure 2. The former

search term is surely a low estimate of public statements by criminologists because many are identified as professors in other disciplines. Professors of criminology or criminal justice rarely were cited until the 1980s, and it is again important to note the dramatic differences in the scale of the data series. The sociology peak of 105 mentions occurred in 1989, whereas the criminology peak of 32 appeared in 2000.

A further illustration of the resonance of criminological work with broader publics is found in Herbert Gans' (1997) compilation of the best-selling sociology books through 1995. Many books at the top of the sociology list have strong currents that involve crime, punishment, and inequality. Books such as Liebow's (1967) *Tally's Corner*, Ryan's (1971) *Blaming the Victim*, and

**FIGURE 2**

**New York Times Mentions of Professors of Criminology and Criminal Justice and Professors of Sociology, 1893-2009**



Whyte's (1943) *Street Corner Society* all sold more than 200,000 copies. Becker's (1963) *Outsiders*, Erikson's (1966) *Wayward Puritans*, Sykes' (1958) *Society of Captives*, and MacLeod's *Ain't No Makin' It* each registered sales in excess of 75,000. Today, such a list likely would include books such as Venkatesh's (2008) *Gang Leader for a Day* and other popular titles.

### Public Criminology Today

From this long history of public criminology, several new strains have emerged. On the research side, we can look to examples such as Africana criminal justice (Ward and Marable, 2003), the Soros Open Society Institute's "new leadership program" for formerly incarcerated persons, the Sentencing Project's numerous reports and initiatives, and many other national and local developments. Public criminology research aims to have an "impact on public policy and the public mind" (Currie, 2007: 178) by building a solid criminological evidentiary base that can be applied to problems that hold public interest. A related goal, however, is to uncover and to build interest in social problems that might have escaped widespread public attention, such as the conditions in prisons or high-crime neighborhoods. Finally, a third goal is to engage seriously the broader impacts of such social problems as well as any proposed solutions, including their scientific, moral, and practical implications. In doing so, we might help "to create the vibrant kind of public research agenda that can sustain enlightened policy and potent innovation" (Clear, 2010: 716).

Good public criminologists are thus well positioned to add valuable information to the national conversation on crime and punishment and to help situate deviance in social life more generally. To do so, they need to invest time in translating their own research and effort in sharing their findings with the larger public (Clear and Frost, 2008; Currie, 2007). As others have noted, "having convincing research evidence and having it influence policy and practice are two very different matters" (Welsh and Farrington, 2005: 350). In fact, Sherman (2005) argued that the greatest disappointment across centuries of experimental criminology is that "most justice remains unencumbered by empirical evidence on its effects" (2005: 119). One task of public criminologists is to highlight and explain the most useful and relevant evidence for any given public. Public criminologists bear the responsibility to educate themselves and their publics on new research and its potential implications. As Clear (2010) suggested:

[I]n an arena where a lot of work (of varying quality) purports to be "evidence" will we have a voice in deciding what research is most important and which studies are most instructive about policy? Will we take responsibility for discussing not only what we know but also how a policy agenda might flow from it? If we do not, then the significance of our work surely will be attenuated by the vicissitudes of the policy process because policy makers will be left to decide for themselves what research matters and why (2010: 720).

By bringing high-quality evidence to bear on hotly contested questions, public criminologists might play a key role in promoting sound policy and averting moral panics precipitated by extreme but rare cases. Such work requires aligning high-quality research with fortuitous timing; as Tonry (2006) suggested, "the receptivity of policy makers to new knowledge depends mightily on the existence of 'windows of opportunity' through which knowledge can pass to receptive recipients" (2006: 54). We also recognize that making such connections is difficult, as public criminologists are increasingly likely to fill a particular niche rather than to possess

the range to speak more broadly as public intellectuals. Although the field of criminology has grown tremendously, scholars' expertise generally has narrowed (Currie, 2007). As Wiles (2002) suggested, today the criminological research community is larger than what existed in the past, but such specialization has made it "more difficult to engage in policy debates unless they are on a narrow and particular point" (pp. 247–248). Along with their own research specialties, the most successful public criminologists necessarily will be generalists, widely educated, and able to speak broadly on issues of crime and justice. They will have to work to stay apprised of the latest research to be accepted as reliable experts or analysts.

Because it tends to reify abstract and artificial boundaries, the two-by-two table presented in Table 1 is a poor reflection of the actual activities of criminologists (see Ericson, 2005, for a similar argument about public sociology). Figure 3 represents public criminology, policy criminology, professional criminology, and critical criminology as interconnected Venn diagrams, with the first panel assigning equal weight to each quadrant and the second emphasizing professional and public work more explicitly. In truth, many criminologists work with a hand or a foot in all four cells, whereas others would self-identify as pure professional criminologists or policy criminologists.

In our view, public criminology is as much about teaching as it is about research. Although criminology has held a place in higher education for nearly a century (Finckenauer, 2005), the mission and content of criminology coursework has changed as these courses largely have departed sociology departments for criminology and criminal justice programs (Best, 2004). Stephen Pfohl observed the following with regard to public sociology:

[The] most common site of public engagement is in the classroom. The general college or university classroom where sociologists typically encounter a public composed of students steeped in the common sense of the dominant culture . . . The point here is not to provide students with a supposedly "politically correct" viewpoint, but to encourage the discernment and thoughtfulness necessary for democracy itself (Burawoy et al., 2004: 113–114).

Faculty members can serve as "transformative intellectuals" (Giroux, 1992), teaching theory-driven models with a sound evidentiary base to both students and the larger public—educating those inside and outside the academy (Currie, 2007). As part of this effort, academics are developing new programs that build the connections among universities, state agencies, and communities. For example, the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program is training faculty members across the country to take college students into prisons in intensive interaction-based courses shared with prison inmates, with the goal of creating a unique transformative learning environment (Pompa, 2004). Inside-Out courses typically culminate in a group project in which university students and inmates work together to make evidence-based policy recommendations. Researching prison issues and articulating specific recommendations thus encourages and empowers students in the class to take their own first steps as public criminologists.

**FIGURE 3**

**Crossover Criminologies**



Teaching as a form of public criminology offers particular relevance and urgency because our classes often comprise future criminal justice practitioners who soon will be in the trenches as lawyers, police officers, parole and probation officers, and corrections and juvenile justice workers. In addition to encouraging students to think critically about larger issues of crime and punishment, criminology classes often ignite the first sparks of student interest in criminal justice



careers. Other young people are drawn to the study of crime and criminal justice because of their interest in popular television shows (such as *CSI* or *Law and Order*) or films; these “undergraduates do not line up to get into criminology departments understanding the realities of the system, and that idealism can be a good thing for thinking more broadly about what real justice is and how it can be achieved . . . we should be supplementing their idealism with eye-opening and empowering exposures” (Tift, Maruna, and Elliott, 2006: 391–392). Perhaps as important as educating these future criminal justice practitioners, classroom teaching influences and informs students who go on to related fields, such as social work or education. Public criminologists who take teaching seriously hope their students enter their chosen professions and indeed the larger responsibilities of citizenship with a more accurate picture and understanding of the causes of crime and the workings of the criminal justice system (Finckenauer, 2005).

Although individual interest and effort is critical to the success of public criminology, so too is institutional support. As Currie (2007) noted, few structural incentives encourage the practice of public criminology in the academy, but some will find it easier than others. Faculty at large land-grant universities, for example, might feel a special responsibility to take their teaching and service into their communities. Because part of the mission is “extension” into surrounding areas, often greater legitimacy is provided and sometimes even rewards for practicing public criminology in such settings. Similarly, faculty who work at Jesuit institutions, such as William Gamson and Stephen Pfohl, might find that public scholarship resonates with their university’s “commitment to ethical reflection and social justice” (Burawoy et al., 2004: 114).

As Burawoy (2004, 2005a) suggested about public sociology, it is likely that these contextual differences lead public criminology to be practiced most widely and valued more highly in large public universities where a high teaching load often exists (Burawoy, 2005a: 12). John Jay College, for example, is among the top-ranked and preeminent graduate and undergraduate criminal justice departments in the United States; yet faculty at John Jay often bear teaching responsibilities far in excess of those in other disciplines and departments. More generally, although faculty members at state institutions might be doing innovative work in public criminology, it often is practiced at the local level, and it might not be recognized beyond its usefulness to community partners and engaged students. Because of their myriad responsibilities in teaching, service, and publishing, faculty members might have precious little time or incentive to document and disseminate their public efforts.

Related to teaching and outreach, the service function within public criminology involves dialogue with communities and with the electronic and print media. Public criminologists should consider their own interests and skill sets and then work to their strengths, which might lead them to “write in forums read by practitioners, to lecture widely, to evaluate and consult, to hold workshops, and to undertake training” (Cullen, 2005: 27). Because academics and researchers rarely are tapped to comment on crime stories on cable news channels or other national forums (Frost and Phillips, 2009), the best strategy might be to publicize one’s work at the local and state level and to contribute to easily accessible media such as blogs and podcasts.

The rewards for such work might be largely intrinsic. Even as they invest effort in educating and working with the public, unless they develop ways to claim and legitimize such service work, scholars' efforts to add to the public conversation and debate on issues of crime and justice are likely to go unrecognized and unrewarded. Additionally, it can be difficult to account for the time and effort that goes into such interactions. For example, in discussing her own experience with public scholarship and with NASA after the space shuttle *Columbia* accident, Diane Vaughan (2005) noted that a great deal of "invisible public sociology" and "invisible work" goes into being a public intellectual (Burawoy et al., 2004).

New media are becoming an increasingly important place within public criminology. Blogs and Web 2.0 technologies quickly are becoming the "preferred newsmaking criminological media of tomorrow" (Barak, 2007: 203). They are without question an increasingly popular forum for innovative scholars to float ideas to interested publics and to receive immediate feedback from thoughtful readers. In practicing our own advice, we started perhaps the first public criminology blog in 2006, and we remain committed to adding content that both educates and reflects on issues of crime and justice ([contexts.org/pubcrim/](http://contexts.org/pubcrim/)). As Chancer and McLaughlin (2007: 169) argued, "[e]vident, at a minimum, is that 'doing' public criminology is closely related to how sophisticated we can become in understanding and participating in a dynamically evolving range of 24/7 mass-media forums."

We note that the discipline of sociology is taking steps to recognize the "invisible" work involved in public sociology; the American Sociological Association's newsletter *Footnotes* regularly publishes a section on sociologists "In the News," touting media appearances and scholars' expert quotes in newspaper and magazine articles. And [contexts.org](http://contexts.org), the website associated with the American Sociological Association's public outreach magazine, was receiving 500,000 page views per month by mid-2009 (Hartmann and Uggen, 2009). As of yet, however, no place exists to recognize criminologists whose work and words appear in the media, as neither the American Society of Criminology nor the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences has a forum to showcase public criminology. The Stockholm Prize in Criminology, however, is awarded consistently to scholars such as John Braithwaite, John Hagan, and Friedrich Losel, in part for their contributions to policy and public criminology.

### Meaning and Public Criminology

Any academic discipline has a division of labor, and public criminology is clearly not for every academic criminologist. Those with the skills and inclination to practice it, however, will be more successful when they have the space and support to do so. As but one example, academic departments can acknowledge public outreach as contributing to the service mission of the university. In reigniting some justice concerns that brought them to graduate study, public criminology can be a powerful antidote to what Cullen (2010) called "antiseptic criminology" by bringing scholars out of their offices to engage in their communities. Public criminology has the potential to enliven the research and teaching of those scholars who find "the majority of mainstream criminological scholarship today . . . boring" (Ferrell, 2004: 295) or who

might be questioning what their work means and for whom are they doing it. By building an evidentiary base on problems of public as well as scholarly concern, it is no doubt possible to be good social scientists and social analysts (Currie, 2007) while also working to increase public safety and reduce human suffering.

To communicate effectively with broader publics, however, requires drawing a responsible circle of expertise around oneself, adhering to what Weber called “an ethic of responsibility” (see, e.g., Gitlin, 2003). Such responsibility entails being vigilant about the accuracy of information that is presented in the name of criminology and acting to challenge false statements, question shoddy evidence, and debunk harmful myths and scare tactics. Even while critiquing overblown claims and stereotypes, public criminologists also must be open to having their own ideas and positions challenged and changed as new evidence emerges. Criminologists seeking the public spotlight should be willing to take on other public intellectuals and debate controversial issues, offering communities access to the most complete information available rather than allowing them to be inundated with politically motivated views or pithy sound bites. We must learn to translate our own research into manageable pieces, offering “suggestions that are at once concrete and visionary enough to have a chance of resulting in actual policy effects” (Chancer and McLaughlin, 2007: 169).

We also should acknowledge the potential costs of practicing public criminology. Making one’s work and perspective visible in the media opens the possibilities for threats and hate mail, loss of credibility, or worse from detractors. It can lead to close identification with the populations one studies; for example, attempts to discuss the low recidivism rates of sex offenders can be derailed by venomous attacks from a fearful public. A public identity also positions the criminologist as an “expert” on the given topic, which can lead to additional—and often compelling—requests that far exceed one’s field of expertise or capacity to provide help. As one example, ex-felons might turn to college professors in seeking help to find a job, housing, or hope as they attempt to manage a deviant identity and rebuild lives in the community. Academic criminologists perhaps can point these individuals to other resources, but such exchanges are time consuming and often feel inadequate. In addition, as Haggerty (2004: 212) noted, well-intentioned policy pronouncements can be coopted easily, leading to a “host of unintended negative consequences.” Despite such challenges, motivated criminologists will weigh the costs and choose public scholarship over the more comfortable and predictable world of antiseptic criminology.

Whether public criminologists are successful in their efforts is unlikely to be apparent immediately. As Vaughan explained, “engaging in dialogue about issues of public concern can make change by altering the perspective of individuals or giving support to what they already think—but the full effects of such change are not always measurable or knowable” (Burawoy et al., 2004: 118). Nevertheless, when our students go home and speak with their friends and families about issues raised and what they are learning in our classes, they become ambassadors for and practitioners of public criminology themselves. They perform a particularly useful ser-

vice when they debunk harmful myths or use criminological evidence to tamp down the moral panics created and escalated by television news and entertainment shows.

In terms of research, it is difficult to predict which research topics or projects are likely to make a splash in the public arena. Certainly areas of concern persist that public criminologists currently are using careful research to address, such as mass incarceration and its effect on disadvantaged communities; juvenile justice and policies for very young offenders; felon disenfranchisement; and prisoner reentry, employment, and housing, to name just a few. Perhaps the best strategy is simply to do good work and to share it widely. When journalists seek an expert opinion, it represents an opportunity to share research findings and their implications. Finally, when our publics ask for our opinions and perspectives, we should give them scientifically informed evidence and answers without the jargon that renders academic discourse so inaccessible or the spin that biases political discourse.

But public criminology represents more than media dissemination of professional knowledge. It also means engaging with communities beyond practitioners and funders, reaching out as Clifford R. Shaw once did to neglected audiences and communities affected by crime. If public criminology is to become a public good, then it can build on the rich legacy of engaged scholarship begun by scholars such as Shaw and contemporary criminologists such as John Braithwaite (2005) and Elliott Currie. As Francis T. Cullen made clear in his 2004 Presidential Address to the American Society of Criminology, when a small number of vigilant criminologists “saved rehabilitation” and treatment, it was

not inevitable but a contingent reality. It depended on real people making real decisions about their careers and about the knowledge they attempted to produce ... if the science of criminology is seen as a collective enterprise, I am optimistic that we are not consigned to irrelevance ... together, we have both the scientific expertise and kindness of heart to make the world a better place (Cullen, 2005: 26, 28).

Today, it seems that public criminology is following the path that Burawoy (2004) outlined for public sociology—recognition, legitimation, institutionalization, and finally, defense and expansion. As public criminology becomes more recognized, legitimated, and institutionalized by universities and professional organizations, more scholars might choose to pursue it, and the field will continue to expand. For others, however, the choice was made long ago based on personal conviction and sacrifice; the ideal and practice of public criminology is the impetus and motivating force behind every project they pursue.

## References

- Aminzade, Ronald. 2004. The engaged department: Public sociology in the twin cities. In *An Invitation to Public Sociology*. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association.
- Barak, Gregg. 2007. Doing newsmaking criminology from within the academy. *Theoretical Criminology*, 11: 191–207.
- Becker, Howard S. 1963. *Outsiders*. New York: Free Press.
- Becker, Howard S. 1967. Whose side are we on? *Social Problems*, 14: 239–247.
- Becker, Howard S. 1995. The power of inertia. *Qualitative Sociology*, 18: 301–309.
- Becker, Howard S. 2003. *Making Sociology Relevant to Society*. Paper presented at the meeting of The European Sociological Association, Murcia, Spain.
- Beckett, Katherine. 1997. *Making Crime Pay: The Politics of Law and Order in the Contemporary United States*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Beckett, Katherine and Theodore Sasson. 2003. *The Politics of Injustice: Crime and Justice in America*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Bennett, William J., John J. DiIulio, Jr., and John P. Walters. 1996. *Body Count: Moral Poverty ... and How to Win America's War against Crime and Drugs*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Best, Joel. 2004. *Deviance: Career of a Concept*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Brady, David. 2004. Why public sociology may fail. *Social Forces*, 82: 1629–1638.
- Brathwaite, John. 2005. For public social science. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 56: 345–353.
- Burawoy, Michael. 2004. Public sociologies: Contradictions, dilemmas, and possibilities. *Social Forces*, 82: 1603–1618.
- Burawoy, Michael. 2005a. For public sociology: 2004 Presidential Address. *American Sociological Review*, 70: 4–28.
- Burawoy, Michael. 2005b. Response: Public sociology: Populist fad or path to renewal? *The British Journal of Sociology*, 56: 417–432.
- Burawoy, Michael. 2005c. The critical turn to public sociology. *Critical Sociology*, 31: 313–326.
- Burawoy, Michael. 2008. What is to be done? Theses on the degradation of social existence in a globalizing world. *Current Sociology*, 56: 351–359.
- Burawoy, Michael, William Gamson, Charlotte Ryan, Stephen Pfohl, Diane Vaughan, Charles Derber, and Juliet Schor. 2004. Public sociologies: A symposium from Boston College. *Social Problems*, 51: 103–130.
- Chancer, Lynn and Eugene McLaughlin. 2007. Public criminologies: Diverse perspectives on academia and policy. *Theoretical Criminology*, 11: 155–173.
- Clear, Todd R. 2010. Policy and evidence: The challenge to the American Society of Criminology: 2009 Presidential Address to the American Society of Criminology. *Criminology*, 48: 1–25.
- Clear, Todd R. and Natasha A. Frost. 2008. Rules of engagement: Criminology and criminal justice policy. *Criminal Justice Matters*, 72: 37–38.

- Cohen, Stanley. 1972. *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*. London, U.K.: MacGibbon and Kee.
- Hartmann, Doug and Chris Uggen. 2009. From the Editors. *Contexts*, 8: 3.
- Cullen, Francis T. 2005. The twelve people who saved rehabilitation: How the science of criminology made a difference. *Criminology*, 43: 1–42.
- Cullen, Francis T. 2010. Elliott Currie: In tribute to a life devoted to confronting crime. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 9: 19–27.
- Currie, Elliott. 1985. *Confronting Crime: An American Challenge*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Currie, Elliott. 1998. *Crime and Punishment in America*. New York: Henry Holt.
- Currie, Elliott. 1999. Reflections on crime and criminology at the millennium. *Western Criminology Review*, 2. Retrieved September 7, 2009 from [wcr.sonoma.edu/v2n1/currie.html](http://wcr.sonoma.edu/v2n1/currie.html).
- Currie, Elliott. 2007. Against marginality: Arguments for a public criminology. *Theoretical Criminology*, 11: 175–190.
- Deflem, Mathieu. 2006. *Sociology and Politics*. Retrieved September 7, 2009 from [savesociology.org](http://savesociology.org).
- DiIulio, John J., Jr. 1995. Arresting ideas: Tougher law enforcement is driving down urban crime. *Policy Review*, 74: 12–16.
- Ericson, Richard. 2005. Publicizing sociology. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 56: 365–372.
- Erikson, Kai T. 1966. *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance*. New York: MacMillan.
- Farrington, David F. and Brandon C. Welsh. 2001. What works in preventing crime? Systematic reviews of experimental and quasiexperimental research. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 578: Full issue.
- Ferrell, Jeff. 2004. Boredom, crime, and criminology. *Theoretical Criminology*, 8: 287–302.
- Finckenauer, James O. 2005. The quest for quality in criminal justice education. *Justice Quarterly*, 22: 413–426.
- Frost, Natasha A. and Nickie D. Phillips. 2010. Talking heads: Crime reporting on cable news. *Justice Quarterly*. In press.
- Frost, Natasha A., Joshua D. Freilich, and Todd R. Clear. 2010. *Contemporary Issues in Criminal Justice Policy: Policy Proposals from the American Society of Criminology Conference*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Gans, Herbert. 1989. Sociology in America: The discipline and the public. *American Sociological Review*, 54: 1–16.
- Gans, Herbert. 1997. Best-sellers by sociologists: An exploratory study. *Contemporary Sociology*, 26: 131–135.
- Gans, Herbert. 2002. More of us should become public sociologists. *ASA Footnotes*, July/August.
- Garland, David. 2001. *The Culture of Control*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

- Garland, David and Richard Sparks. 2000. Criminology, social theory, and the challenge of our times. *British Journal of Criminology*, 40: 189–204.
- Giroux, Henry A. 1992. *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education*. New York: Routledge.
- Gitlin, Todd. 2003. *Letters to a Young Activist*. New York: Basic Books.
- Glassner, Barry. 1999. *The Culture of Fear*. New York: Basic Books.
- Hagan, John and Bill McCarthy. 2000. The meaning of criminology. *Theoretical Criminology*, 4: 232–242.
- Haggerty, Kevin D. 2004. Displaced expertise: Three constraints on the policy-relevance of criminological thought. *Theoretical Criminology*, 8: 211–231.
- Hayward, Keith J. and Jock Young. 2004. Cultural criminology: Some notes on the script. *Theoretical Criminology*, 8: 259–273.
- Irwin, John. 1970. *The Felon*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Jacobson, Michael. 2005. *Downsizing Prisons: How to Reduce Crime and End Mass Incarceration*. New York: New York University Press.
- Krisberg, Barry. 2005. *Juvenile Justice: Redeeming Our Children*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Laub, John H. 2005. Edwin H. Sutherland and the Michael-Adler Report: Searching for the soul of criminology seventy years later. *Criminology*, 44: 235–258.
- Laub, John H. and Robert J. Sampson. 1991. The Sutherland-Gluck debate: On the sociology of criminological knowledge. *American Journal of Sociology*, 96: 1402–1440.
- Laub, John H. and Robert J. Sampson. 2003. *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives: Delinquent Boys to Age 70*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Liebow, Elliott. 1967. *Tally's Corner: A Study of Negro Streetcorner Men*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Loader, Ian and Richard Sparks. 2008. What are we gonna do now? Revisiting the public roles of criminology. *Criminal Justice Matters*, 72: 18–19.
- Lundman, Richard J. 2001. *Prevention and Control of Juvenile Delinquency*, 3rd edition. New York: Oxford University Press.
- MacLeod, Jay. 1985. *Ain't No Makin' It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood*. Boulder: Westview.
- Miller, Jerome G. 1996. *Search and Destroy: African-American Males in the Criminal Justice System*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- Miller, Jerome G. 1998. *Last One Over the Wall: The Massachusetts Experiment in Closing Reform Schools*, 2nd Edition. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press.
- Moody, James. 2005. *The Heart of Sociology*. Paper presented at the Ohio State University Department of Sociology, Columbus, OH.
- Nagin, Daniel S. 2005. *Group-Based Modeling of Development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Nielsen, Francois. 2004. The vacant “We”: Remarks on public sociology. *Social Forces*, 82: 1619–1627.

- Piquero, Alex R. 2008. Taking stock of developmental trajectories of criminal activity over the life course. In (Akiva Liberman, ed.), *The Long View of Crime: A Synthesis of Longitudinal Research*. New York: Springer.
- Pompa, Lori. 2004. Disturbing where we are comfortable: Notes from behind the walls. *Reflections: A Journal of Writing, Service Learning and Community Literacy*, 4: 24–34.
- Presdee, Mike. 2004. Cultural criminology: The long and winding road. *Theoretical Criminology*, 8: 275–285.
- Quinney, Richard. 1977. *Class, State, and Crime*. New York: David McKay.
- Risman, Barbara J. 2009. One thing I know: Bringing social science to the White House. *Contexts*, 8: 80.
- Ryan, William. 1971. *Blaming the Victim*. New York: Pantheon.
- Savelsberg, Joachim J., Lara Cleveland, and Ryan King. 2004. Institutional environments and scholarly work: American criminology, 1951–1993. *Social Forces*, 82: 1275–1302.
- Savelsberg, Joachim J. and Sarah M. Flood. 2004. Criminological knowledge: Period and cohort effects in scholarship. *Criminology*, 42: 1009–1041.
- Schlossman, Steven and Michael Sedlak. 1983. The Chicago Area Project revisited. *Crime & Delinquency*, 29: 398–462.
- Shaw, Clifford R. 1966. *The Jack-Roller*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Sherman, Lawrence. 2005. The use and usefulness of criminology, 1751–2005: Enlightened justice and its failures. *ANNALS AAPSS*, 600: 115–135.
- Sherman, Lawrence, Denise C. Gottfredson, Doris L. MacKenzie, John E. Eck, Peter Reuter, and Shawn D. Bushway. 1998. Preventing crime: What works, what doesn't, what's promising. *National Institute of Justice Research in Brief*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Short, James F., Jr. 1975. The natural history of an applied theory: Differential opportunity and “mobilization for youth.” In (N.J. Demerath, III, Otto Larsen, and Karl Schuessler, eds.), *Social Policy and Sociology*. New York: Academic Press.
- Sykes, Gresham M. 1958. *Society of Captives: A Study of Maximum Security Prison*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Tiftt, Larry, Shadd Maruna, and Elizabeth Elliott. 2006. The state of criminology in the 21st century: A penpal roundtable. *Contemporary Justice Review*, 9: 387–400.
- Tittle, Charles R. 2004. The arrogance of public sociology. *Social Forces*, 82: 1639–1643.
- Tonry, Michael H. 2006. Criminology, mandatory minimums, and public policy. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 5: 45–56.
- Vaughan, Diane. 2005. On the relevance of ethnography for the production of public sociology and policy. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 56: 412–416.
- Venkatesh, Sudhir. 2008. *Gang Leader for A Day: A Rogue Sociologist Takes to the Streets*. New York: Penguin Press.
- Ward, Geoff K. and Manning Marable. 2003. Toward a new civic leadership: The Africana Criminal Justice Project. *Social Justice*, 30: 89–98.



- Welsh, Brandon C. and David P. Farrington. 2005. Evidence-based crime prevention: Conclusions and directions for a safer society. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 47: 337–350.
- Whyte, William Foote. 1943. *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Wiles, Paul. 2002. Criminology in the 21st century: Public good or private interest?—The Sir John Barry Memorial lecture. *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 35: 238–252.
- Wilson, James Q. 1975. *Thinking about Crime*. New York: Basic Books.
- 

**Christopher Uggen** is the Distinguished McKnight Professor and Chair of Sociology at the University of Minnesota. He studies crime, punishment, and inequality, in hopes that research helps light the way to a more just and safer world. His work appears in *American Sociological Review*, *Criminology*, and *Law & Society Review* and in media such as the *New York Times*, *The Economist*, and *NPR*. With Doug Hartmann, he edits *Contexts*, the public outreach magazine of the American Sociological Association.

**Michelle Inderbitzin** is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Oregon State University. Her research and teaching interests center on prison culture, juvenile justice, and innovative education. Along with her on campus courses, she frequently teaches classes in men's prisons and works with girls in a juvenile correctional facility. Her research has appeared in *Punishment & Society*, *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, and *College Teaching*.



# POLICY ESSAY

## PUBLIC CRIMINOLOGIES

### Comment on “Public Criminologies”

**Paul Rock**

*London School of Economics  
University of Pennsylvania*

**P**ublic criminology is a laudable project, but it does raise some minor problems touching on the law of diminishing marginal returns, lopsided analysis, an overemphasis on the relevant, and the proper appreciation of policy-making processes.

Uggen and Inderbitzin’s (2010, this issue) “Public Criminologies” follows in the wake of the stir created by Michael Burawoy (2005) in his 2004 presidential address to the American Sociological Association and by Todd R. Clear (2010) in his more recent 2009 presidential address to the American Society of Criminology. It is a call for a greater academic engagement with “issues of public concern” in civic, policy, and political debates about crime, criminal justice, and criminal law. There can be little dissent from such an appeal. Who, after all, would not wish criminology to make its mark—especially on a criminal justice system distinguished by a seemingly inexorable inflation of the penal estate? I am not hostile to the emergence or reemergence of a public criminology. Indeed, I support it, and any comments I make therefore should be read as only weakly critical.<sup>1</sup>

More than 3,000 people, from the United States and overseas participated in the 2009 meetings of the American Society of Criminology, the conference at which Todd R. Clear spoke. They attended sessions on African criminology, convict criminology, critical criminology, cultural criminology, feminist criminology, green criminology, international criminology, mathematical criminology, “psychophysiological” criminology, rural criminology, and “theory-based” criminology. They might have been aware that the history of their discipline had been molded by phrenology, criminal anthropology, eugenicist criminology, psychoanalytic criminology, functionalist criminology, phenomenology, conversational analysis and ethnomethodology, symbolic

---

I am indebted to David Downes and Tim Newburn, who have made several extremely helpful observations on various sections of this essay. Direct correspondence to Paul Rock, Department of Sociology, Mannheim Centre for the Study of Criminology and Criminal Justice, London School of Economics, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE (e-mail: p.rock@lse.ac.uk).

1. I also will try to refrain from repeating arguments that have been put forward elsewhere.

interactionist criminology, radical criminology, Marxist criminology, left-idealist criminology, left-realist criminology, ecological criminological, and structuralist criminology. They also might have known that its present character is being shaped by other criminologies not formally listed in that 2009 conference program, including existential criminology, constitutive criminology, consumerist criminology, peacemaking criminology, and conservation criminology.

Each of those cadet branches has been championed with apparent fervor and conviction in its time, and the outcome has been a continual clamor of small voices vying for an audience, none in clear ascendancy for very long, and few commanding more than a small following. In an open and contested discipline, no reason exists to resist the addition of public criminology as another candidate for attention; it might affect practice and policy, add to the span of ideas from which scholars can choose, foment debate and intellectual excitation, and undermine the risk of the discipline lapsing into scholasticism. But the proposal leads one to wonder about the marginal utility of introducing yet one more contender into the criminological stable (unless, of course, it is read simply as an encouragement to do criminology, and therefore, any of these criminologies, in a particular way,<sup>2</sup> which is not so new at all.<sup>3</sup>) Uggen and Inderbitzen (2010) themselves acknowledge that “public criminology is clearly not for every academic criminologist,” and they qualify their thesis in other ways, but I will take their call seriously, if only to develop a solid and coherent argument.

The stance I adopt is perhaps a little jaded because my recent experience of attempting a public criminology has not been happy. At the beginning of this century, I acted as the so-called Key Expert on Victims and Witnesses for the European Union Phare Horizontal Programme for Strengthening the Rule of Law (see European Commission, 2002). I participated in missions to report on ten candidate states' compliance with European minimum criminal justice standards for the purpose of assessing their eligibility for admission to the European Union. We visited ten states and delivered reports, but we were told at the very outset by the man leading the missions that nothing we could say would affect whether the accession states were admitted. It was entirely a political decision, and compliance was practically immaterial. My second experience was an evaluation, conducted at the behest of the Ministry of Justice, of the experimental introduction of victim impact statements (or family impact statements) in homicide trials in England and Wales (see Department for Constitutional Affairs, 2005). Halfway through the pilot period, what was called the Victims Advocates Initiative was aborted and replaced by another, the Victims Focus Scheme (see Ministry of Justice, 2008); my report was not read, it was not discussed, and no questions were put to me (see Rock, 2010). It all seemed a little foolish.

---

2. I am indebted to Tim Newburn for this point.

3. David Downes has reminded me that criminologists have had a public face for a long time, intervening from time to time at critical points in policy debates. Lawrence Sherman and Heather Strang have mounted a powerful case for restorative justice (although restorative justice has not been adopted widely), and Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin have provided a rationale for themes in Mobilization for Youth (see Mobilization for Youth, 1960: 44–45), although the ensuing projects foundered (see Marris and Rein, 1974: 122–123).

### Some Cavils about Public Criminology

Questions appear, and the first touches on what it is that a public criminology actually might wish to convey to an audience of lay people, policy officials, and politicians. I recall an occasion when a home secretary visited the London School of Economics and asked the cluster of criminologists there assembled what achievements of criminology he should heed, and it was silent. On an earlier occasion, Sir Cyril Phillips (1981), acting as the chairman of the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure, put much the same question to the same group and received much the same response. It is possible that had the questions been put later, or to a different group, the answers might have been different, but Lynn McDonald's (1976) claim, made some time ago, that criminology has done well in puncturing claims, but not in establishing them, still seems to hold.<sup>4</sup> We do know some things, but we do not understand much and much we have not been able to predict<sup>5</sup> about even the most profound transformations in the world of crime and criminal justice (see, e.g., Zimring, 2007). Ours is a largely skeptical science, and skepticism is useful enough in a world of political enthusiasms and simple nostrums, but some *hubris* might be present in imagining we have much that is concrete to offer. One is reminded of John Braithwaite's (2000: 223) observation that "[t]he criminology boom is not fed by the intellectual accomplishments of the field, but by the continuous growth in public sector employment in the criminal justice system."

The second issue turns on the selection of ideas we would wish to expose to greater public scrutiny. Criminology has been a factious, ideologically driven, and sometimes Laputan discipline replete with assertions we might not wish to have broadcast widely. Its practitioners have not always resembled in every particular the pleasing portrait offered by Uggen and Inderbitzen (2010) when they talk of "[p]ublic criminologists, armed with peer-reviewed evidence, clear points, and plain language..." there are warts. Recall the wholesale and lengthy scholarly neglect of the victim and victimization—how crime was represented as functional to the proper working of society without any regard to what Matza (1969: 49–53) once called "pathos"; how the criminal law and criminal justice system were taken by some to be overwhelmingly, unremittingly, and unambiguously repressive in their management of the poor (Center for Research on Criminal Justice, 1975; Reiman, 1979); how property crime was defined as an expropriation of the expropriators and not, as David Downes once put it, a regressive tax on the poor; how the fear of, or anxiety about, crime frequently was dismissed as an ideological distraction, mystification, or moral panic (see Box, 1983; Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, and Roberts, 1993); how gender first was bleached out of analysis and then crudely reintroduced to convict males *tout court* of violent intimidation (see Madriz, 1997); and how prisoners, on the one hand, were treated as scapegoats herded together to deflect and divide proletarian class

4. McDonald (1976: 15) said that "there is now a whole literature showing that rehabilitation programmes do not rehabilitate and prevention programmes do not prevent."

5. Who, for example, anticipated before the mid-1990s the decline in crime rates across the developed world? Sociology has fared as badly. It failed to envisage the renaissance of religion as a social force, the collapse of the Soviet bloc, and much else. We have been masterly at prophesying the past.

consciousness (Foucault, 1979) and, on the other hand, were treated as primitive rebels who might serve as a revolutionary vanguard (Mathiesen, 1974). To be sure, many of these notions now largely (if not wholly) have been discredited, and they sometimes have been discredited by evidence, but they had their advocates; they were not always vigorously challenged in their day, they were potential candidates for a public criminology, and it almost certainly would have been a kindness to the discipline and to the profession to hide them from public gaze.

Transparency and publicity then might have their costs, unless of course, a public criminology is to be a bowdlerized criminology. And who would be the Bowdler? Uggen and Inderbitzen's (2010) "professional criminology," they say, "derives its legitimacy from its presumed application of scientific methods." But that legitimacy is also the "unchecked positivism" of Young's (2004: 20) "Voodoo criminology"; and Hillyard, Sim, Tombs, and Whyte's (2004: 383) "endless conveyor belt of predictable and auto-suggestive findings, often generated by large-scale, publicly funded, state-sanctioned, evaluation-oriented research projects that are ultimately self-serving." I pass no judgment, but it is evident that one criminologist's authority is another's "number crunching, schematic and instrumental positivism" (Scraton, 2001: 3).

Third is the matter of relevance. A public criminology is a *relevant* criminology, either in the research it conducts or in the manner in which it conveys research to outsiders. How relevance or issues of concern are defined is a matter of political contingency, contested in the past, and is not self-evident; after all, many publics and many criminologies are raising the possibility of too great an attentiveness to one particular set of "public" concerns. Adjudicating that process of contestation might be regarded as part of the work of a public criminology, but it does threaten to promote intradisciplinary quarrels that remove it from the public arena and reduce its potency and authority.

Of course, one working conception of relevance has very real consequences for the discipline, and that is what the state and its agencies deem to be problematic.<sup>6</sup> The criminology commissioned by the state almost invariably is supposed to be relevant in its practical utility to the policy maker. So it is that the National Institute of Justice says of itself that it is "the research, development and evaluation agency of the U.S. Department of Justice. We provide objective, independent, evidence-based knowledge and tools to meet the challenges of crime and justice, particularly at the state and local levels. . . . Our research agenda must be driven by professionals in the real world — those who deal with crime and justice problems every day" (National Institute of Justice, 2010). Its English and Welsh counterpart, the Research Development and Statistics branch of the Home Office, "is an integral part of the Home Office. We manage research and collect statistics in a number of areas. . . . This information helps Home Office ministers and policy-makers address the concerns of ordinary citizens. It also helps the police, the courts and immigration officials to do their jobs as effectively as possible" (Home Office, 2010). Those are perfectly sensible and suitable objectives, appropriate to the institutions that house

---

6. To be sure, the state and its agencies are themselves diverse and not in accord about how to identify or confront problems (see, e.g., Boyd-Caine, 2010). Public concern is far from unambiguous.

and finance them. But bodies like the National Institute of Justice and the Home Office—and bodies deferential to them, such as the British Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)<sup>7</sup>—massively dominate the commissioning and supporting of research.

It is not policy-relevant criminology so defined that is at risk of emaciation, but a criminology that is *not* relevant in any commonplace, utilitarian meaning of the term, a criminology for which funds and public support are far less secure. Universities are, like the medieval monastery, one of the very few sanctuaries left for those who might seek to pursue forms of knowledge that have no apparent immediate impact and no utility or that might have potential impact and relevance but not to the questions currently identified as most relevant. Those forms are demanded neither in the market place nor by the government. They are *not* relevant. No doubt, an irrelevant criminology in time could have implications for policy; indeed, it provides much of the intellectual capital of public criminology, but relevance is a dangerous idol. Uggen and Inderbitzen (2010) probably would concede the point, but it is not principally public criminology that needs its champions.

Consider the plight of British universities currently assailed by a government intent on a crude Gradgrindian agenda. Lord Mandelson, the Minister responsible for the Department

- 
7. The ESRC proclaimed that “[w]e have an international reputation both for providing high-quality research on issues of importance to business, the public sector and government, and for our commitment to training world-class social scientists. . . . The quality of life and economic well-being of the UK and its citizens are just two of the many, policy-relevant issues addressed by our research and training activities. Comparative and international perspectives are strongly encouraged. For example, UK economic performance is increasingly dependent on the global economy, and economic distribution - both within and between countries and regions - is a major issue for social science research. The senior decision making body is the ESRC Council. It includes members of the business, voluntary and public sectors, as well as the academic community. The Chief Executive of ESRC, supported by four main directorates, based in ESRC’s Swindon headquarters, is responsible for the implementation of Council’s policies and decisions, and for the overall management of ESRC” (ESRC, 2010). Similarly, the Nuffield Foundation stated that “Lord Nuffield wanted his Foundation to ‘advance social well being’, particularly through research and practical experiment. The Foundation aims to achieve this by supporting work which will bring about improvements in society, and which is founded on careful reflection and informed by objective and reliable evidence. The Foundation’s income . . . comes from the returns on its investments. It does not fund-raise, or receive money from the Government. The Foundation’s financial independence and lack of vested interests helps to ensure an impartial and even-handed approach to problems in the projects it funds. Most of the Foundation’s income is spent on grants, some of which are for research and others support practical innovation or development, often in voluntary sector organisations. In both cases the preference is for work that has wide significance, beyond the local or routine. The Foundation looks to support projects that are imaginative and innovative, take a thoughtful and rigorous approach to problems, and have the potential to influence policy or practice” (Nuffield Foundation, 2010). The Ford Foundation said “A fundamental challenge facing every society is to create political, economic and social systems that promote peace, human welfare and the sustainability of the environment on which life depends. We believe that finding solutions to the world’s most complex problems requires engaging the people and the communities closest to them, including men and women from diverse backgrounds and all levels of society. We work mainly by making grants or loans that build knowledge and strengthen organizations and networks. These methods of problem-solving reflect our mission and the diverse ways we support grantees. They also describe a model of philanthropy that the foundation has pursued since its inception: To be a long-term and flexible partner with innovative leaders on the frontlines of social change” (Ford Foundation, 2010).

for Business Innovation and Skills (formerly, it should be noted with sadness, the Department for Education and Science) observed:

The Government want universities to make an even bigger contribution to Britain's economic recovery and future growth.

We have therefore decided to give greater priority to programmes that meet the need for high level skills, especially in key areas such as science, technology, engineering and maths. There will be a greater element of competition between universities for new contestable funding as an incentive to fulfil this priority. With employers and universities, we will identify where the supply of graduates is not meeting demand for key skills. And we will seek to re-balance this, by asking HEFCE [the Higher Education Funding Council] to prioritise the courses and subjects which match these skills needs.

We will look to business to be more active partners with our universities. We want employers to be fully engaged in the funding and design of university programmes, the sponsorship of students, and offering work placements (Mandelson, 2009).

The invocation of concern so framed could eclipse the writings of Zygmunt Bauman, Phillippe Bourgois, Manuel Eisner, Norbert Elias, David Garland,<sup>8</sup> Ian Loader and Richard Sparks, or Pieter Spierenberg. It even might inhibit Elijah Anderson, Nils Christie, Mitch Duneier, Malcolm Feeley, Jonathan Simon, or Loic Wacquant. It could strip criminology of some of its intellectual vigor. It could diminish the anthropological distance that is required for effective scholarship.

Problems should be treated as topics as well as resources, as matters for critical, dispassionate inquiry as well as passion, relevance, and commitment, and that sentiment also is offered in "Public Criminologies." But, in echoing Burawoy's (2005) plea, and urging students of criminology to retain their "moral commitments" and concern for "justice issues and public outreach mission that originally drew [them] into the field" (Uggen and Inderbitzin, 2010), Uggen and Inderbitzin put criminology at risk of being thrown back into the cockpit of political and moral struggles from which it once painfully climbed (see Mills, 1943). After all, a superabundance of interested groups is fighting for mastery over the definition and control of issues of crime and justice, groups that are *parti pris*, whose answers have been fixed in advance by conviction or allegiance to one side or another in the conflicts of the criminal justice system. Criminology should be wary of joining them.

It is in that context that the allusion (Uggen and Inderbitzin, 2010) to Howard Becker's (1967) question "Whose side are we on?" and his and others' "unconventional sentimentality toward those marked as deviants" is not helpful. The disinterested observer who seeks to

---

8. "David Garland is probably the best known and most cited British criminologist at the moment," but his "work [which] is an extended commentary on government crime control policy . . . is nevertheless largely detached from the day-to-day questions with which politicians and their advisors have to grapple" (Hough, 2010: 12).



understand how interactions unfold—how, in another phrase of Becker’s, “people do things together”—has no business taking sides or giving interpretive privilege or ontological superiority to just one party in a social exchange. We have no sound methodological warrant to populate our analyses, on the one hand, with the fully fleshed typifications of those we acclaim and, on the other hand, with cardboard and motivationally impoverished representations of those whom we deplore. The outcome only can be a lopsided scholarship (see Manning, 1975). For heuristic and hermeneutic purposes, we should not be on *anyone’s* side.

Too few scholars are disinterested. We all know how “victim-precipitation” became reclassified as “victim-blaming” and was removed from the canon of what could be studied safely (Clark and Lewis, 1977); how race and ethnicity became troublesome subjects for the criminologist (see Jones, Maclean, and Young, 1986); how some penologists in the past were reluctant to engage in what Mathieson called the work of “system-strengthening” (1974); and how some colleagues would not have any truck with the police or the state. Such censorship can flow all too easily from “moral commitments.” Far better a criminology that adopts the phenomenological epoché that suspends the natural attitude, retains its integrity, and permits any and all questions to be asked freely, irrespective of moral and public commitments (see Schutz, 1967).

### The Policy-Making Process

Last, I would question how much and what form of impact a public criminology might make on the policy-making process, which requires one to step back and reflect on the way in which that process actually unwinds in routine cases. Uggen and Inderbitzin (2010) quote Clear’s (2010: 717) statement that “the absence of a scholarly voice on matters often results in bad policy, and those who (knowing better) remain silent must share some of the blame for that policy”,<sup>9</sup> but that heaps too much responsibility on a discipline that tends to lack the power to affect much of what is done. A scholarly voice needs an attentive audience, and fewer and fewer officials and politicians are prepared to listen<sup>10</sup> (Loader and Sparks [2008: 19] remarked that “criminology . . . has seen its expansion inside universities coincide with the decline of a receptive constituency within government who shared criminology’s liberal commitments and were minded to call upon its practitioners for advice”).

What can we say about policy making and its receptivity to criminology? We rarely have approached the policy process from within or have exposed it to prolonged observation. When it has considered the matter at all, criminology has taken to viewing it in two distinct ways. One holds that making policy is an end of criminology and that the discipline should be structured so that it is serviceable to practical action through the tendering of advice, the provision of ways of seeing the world, attempts to measure and predict the onset of (and desistance from) criminal careers, the mounting of projects and the evaluation of work done by practitioners and others,

9. Elsewhere, Clear and Frost (2008: 38) stated that “[s]ilence is seen by some as condoning [a] policy or, at the very least, failing to contest it with a strong and potentially influential voice.”

10. Although the appointments of Laurie Robinson and John H. Laub to the Department of Justice in the United States might make some difference there, if only for a while.

and so on. I take it that that is, in effect and very largely, the stance of a public criminology, and there is here a strong remnant is here of blue book ideology, a form of Fabianism, which assumes that policy makers and politicians should be amenable to rational guidance once the facts have been marshaled appropriately by experts. It is rarely so amenable, and criminologists frequently complain that the world of criminal justice politics is often perverse and resistant to reason. It is indeed convenient to argue, as Tim Newburn observed, that it is the scholar who is rational and the politician who is wanting of rationality (T. Newburn, personal communication, April 10, 2010).

The other direction is to take criminal justice policy making itself as an object of scholarly inquiry, examining it as a problematic entity that might be studied in its own right. Here the approach is usually some variant of rational choice theory or of a political economy that places policy making in a larger analytic frame of the social, political, and economic structures of the state and, as is more common these days, configurations of states and transnational organizations. So it is that we read of policies variously presented as instances of the crisis of late capitalism—variously predicted, like Nostradamus, in near-apocalyptic tones, the vertigo of late modernity, the new governmentality, governing through crime, the looming importance of risk and responsabilization, transcarceration (especially in unequal societies), the political economy of the ever-growing carceral state or new *Gulag*, the dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion in societies portrayed as bulemic or as bearing traces of religions of condemnation or redemption, and changing sensibilities and shifts in the culture of control.

These arguments are provocative and interesting, and they have produced what have become authoritative and often fruitful ways of looking at problems of policy formation. But the data (and they *are* characteristically *data*) on which they rest tend to be materials already in the public domain such as the following: published statistics in and around the sphere of crime and criminal justice, public speeches, newspaper articles, public policy statements, and so on—materials of the kind that Cicourel and Kitsuse (1963) represented long ago as the indexical outcrops of lengthy organizational work. They are in great measure what has been *allowed* by politicians, officials, and practitioners, after much deliberation, finally to come into public view—preassembled collections of social facts that compress and stand in diverse ways for a mass of subterranean bureaucratic work. Analysis at the level of public representations is permissible and useful; after all, such representations constitute a realm of social facts, which is not only *sui generis* but consequential, and it has led to powerful commentary, but it is manifestly incomplete. And, in compensation for what it cannot or does not choose to see, it tends to work by descriptive fiat, operating either with an imputed logic of the situation or with a tacit and speculative functionalism or teleology, which maintains that what is visible has latent or manifest purposes that the social scientist is equipped to discern.

All too often, criminologists and sociologists have not interrogated with any curiosity or diligence what takes place in the private sphere *as* policies are formed. They have not peered into the black box of the political process but have become observers after the event when policies

are neatly packaged, discursively tidied up, agreed and coherent, free of discontinuities, false starts, doubts, falterings, and lacunae. They have had to bootleg in assumptions, endowing those processes—for want of a competing narrative supplied from within—with what might be an inappropriate history, telos, and rationale, taking perhaps far too uncritically what is said carefully and for particular rhetorical purposes by calculating people before particular audiences. At the same time, and in accord with social science's penchant to reduce actors on the social scene to serviceable homunculi who have just enough intelligence and sensibility to follow the scripts that the analyst needs to explain action, policy makers and politicians themselves sometimes can be transformed into little more than cut-out figures, who lack an independent capacity for strategy, irony, thought, and reflection. Sometimes, indeed, no reference is made at all to principals, puppet-like or otherwise, but only to structures, modes, sensibilities, mentalities, networks, cultures, and systems. The private world of politics thereby becomes a convenient analytic extrapolation of its public manifestations, and it is small wonder that we fail so consistently to comprehend how it is that the politics of crime take the forms they do. In Tim Newburn's words, we "seriously misunderstand the policy-making process" (T. Newburn, personal communication, April 10, 2010).

It is evident that "Public criminologies" talks almost exclusively to a U.S. readership about the impact of a U.S. criminology on U.S. publics and U.S. policy making.<sup>11</sup> People do things differently elsewhere, and because I am more familiar with policy making in Commonwealth countries with a Parliamentary system, it is of that form of government that I shall next speak.

Policies can be generated by politicians making decisions—sometimes independently—but as is typical, they trickle through the system for long periods before they come to the surface, and in so doing, they might come to possess several distinct traits. The following traits might seem obvious in the telling, but I trust that they will be worth citing because they are so rarely, if ever, invoked in the criminology and sociology of the policy process, a process that almost never has been exposed to fieldwork, and they are prerequisite to a proper appreciation of the impact of research<sup>12</sup>:

1. Policy making is, first, a matter of words. It is *rhetorical*, an activity set within and constitutive of a world of articles, talks, speeches, and committees, and it is centrally concerned with the artful and effective deployment of argument to persuade a succession of critical audiences who must be won over if it is to succeed. It tends inevitably to draw on other arguments already approved that are known to have worked in the pragmatically relevant and usually recent past, to call on mandates, election promises, manifestos, international agreements, declarations, and framework decisions, and in so doing, it tends—particularly when what is proposed is new and perhaps untried—to take on the protective coloring of

11. Take, for example, the observation that courses in criminology "largely have departed sociology departments for criminology and criminal justice programs." That almost certainly would not hold for the work of criminology outside the United States.

12. I am drawing in what follows on my own experience of fieldwork in Canada and the United Kingdom. See especially Rock (1986, 1990, 1996, and 2004).

a political phrasing already endorsed and potent and will encourage it to sail under flags of convenience. Then from time to time, it might become the business of an astute official, attempting to steer safely an innovative policy to its destination, to smuggle new content into old clothes, to use extant policies as a Trojan horse (as Canadian officials did with the Justice for Victims of Crime Initiative [see Rock, 1986]), to mask the unfamiliar and contentious with the outward appearance of the familiar and uncontroversial. How policies are presented then might require considerable deciphering because they always might not be what they seem, and the language of research might play only a little part because it is not a *political* language or a language entirely amenable to political ends.

2. Second, policy making is *contingent*. It will encounter throughout the course of its development events other policies in train, crises, and opportunities that never can be anticipated initially. Characteristically, and *faut de mieux*, attempts will be made to build on and incorporate the politics of those events in some fashion, to appropriate them to strengthen or protect what is being done, to ride piggyback on initiatives that already have a proven political authority and momentum, to make it seem that what is being done is perfectly consistent with what else is happening and what else has been endorsed in the political sphere. Those attempts will seize the propitious moment when scandals and problems erupt, funding opportunities suddenly present themselves, or as necessary, for some reason, to convey the impression that something is being done to allay fear, criticism, or alarm (see, e.g., the remarks made about police raids in Cleveland, OH, in the early 20th century [Cleveland Foundation, 1922] or in “Wincanton” 45 years later [Gardiner, 1967]). Policy making thereby might be more than a little *opportunistic* and in ways to which a public criminology might make little contribution.
3. Third, policy making tends, by extension, to be *crecive*, which is a tendency that will be amplified because it is more than convenient to allow administrative committees, task forces, and commissions to be laden with additional work that needs to be done or as it crops up during the course of their deliberations. Characteristically, it thus will come to swell, absorbing, and refurbishing materials that are immediately at hand in the public and political mind, leading to the making of some fairly idiosyncratic, context-dependent (or indexical), and expedient fusions of argument.
4. Policy making cannot but be sensed by its principals and close observers as *indeterminate*. In the beginning, they always cannot be aware of precisely where their activity will lead or what they will encounter. How could they? There is a voyage of exploration into what might be unknown terrain, and to paraphrase a symbolic interactionist dictum, no explorer knows what he or she is exploring until it has been explored. It is often difficult to plan ahead or to formulate in advance demands for information and expert knowledge because questions tend to develop only during the course of policy making itself.
5. Policy making is *emergent*. Identities, motives, purposes, relations, facts, and issues might change meaning radically as events unfold, and they will do so in ways that are not always given in any set of initial conditions. Officials might acquire commitments, understand-

ings, and connections that were not apparent when they began work, and it is partly for that reason that, in the civil service of England and Wales at least, they tend to be rotated periodically from post to post lest, as it is said, they “go native” and acquire parochial allegiances and passions that are thought to compete with the overall aims and objectives of the departments and government they serve. What seemed relevant at the outset can seem less than relevant as matters progress. What is useful evidential knowledge at the end might not have been so in the beginning.

6. Moreover, officials and politicians themselves actively will shape what lies before them—that is, how and why policy work is done—so that it becomes a moving synthesis of discovery and something else, the *construction* and *reconfiguration* of contiguous topographical features, which then will become a moving amalgam of old and new rhetorics, facts, practices, and methodologies.
7. Part of that process of construction and reconfiguration lies in the routine practice of engaging in discussion with bodies, the so-called stakeholders, that might be affected by what is projected and who might have views to offer. In so doing, new maps will be drawn and new structures will be created as policy makers peer ahead and transform parts of the world into an evolving timetable of committees, conferences, and consultations. Life, Simmel once said, can become more than life. It can become reified. What might have been given practical organization and significance by policy makers can acquire a capacity to answer back, to make demands independently of the politicians’ and officials’ will, and a dialectic can come into play in which political work creates an exoskeleton of social facts that will constrain and redefine policies in a fashion that at first might not have been sought or foretold.
8. The most important of such stakeholders are those who control strategic sectors lying in and around the criminal justice system because they have the power to block, impede, or accelerate anything that is planned. Policy must appear amenable to their interests because it is likely to fail without at least their passive acquiescence. Read aright, then, any policy almost invariably will bear the impression of those organizations, even if that impression is, as it were, merely a token obeisance to their authority. Whether an objective observer would say that that acknowledgment is actually germane to the ostensible purposes of a policy or to rational decision making is immaterial because it is vital to the pragmatics of statecraft. Lesser bodies, particularly in the private sector, generally count for less because proposals can be ratified without them, which remains the case, even though their interests might seem more central to the substance and form of any sensibly devised strategy.

In this sense, policy making is as much a matter of *Realpolitik* as the application of a disinterested reason based on evidence of what works. After all, *nothing* can work without the approval of the powers of the criminal justice system, and their approval rests on an array of preconditions, including symbolic recognition, the awarding of resources, and the conferring of a freedom to act in certain ways. The criminal justice system is not immune to what is called in

the United States “pork barrel” politics. And that is why criminology itself often plays so small a role in what is done. It might be far less important that criminologists endorse a measure than that, at the outset, the judiciary, or heads of other government departments, or chiefs of police, and then later, politicians on both sides of both Houses of Parliament do so.

What political power does the criminologist wield? How many battalions does he or she have? Of course, it is not necessarily sensible or politic to advance in the teeth of strong criminological advice, but such advice can, as they say, be “cherry-picked”; it is often equivocal, it might lead to political embarrassment, constituencies and electorates might be resistant, and it is not always timely. Politics does tend to trump science. It was for just that reason that the British government’s chief adviser on drugs was dismissed recently because he suggested that alcohol and tobacco are more dangerous than marijuana.<sup>13</sup> What he said might have been credible enough scientifically; it was what would have graced a public criminology, but it was politically and electorally indigestible.<sup>14</sup>

9. Many public utterances by officials and politicians then should not be read as innocent of context; they tend to be genuflections to powerful audiences, to governments, government

13. See “Sacked adviser criticises Brown”:

**The UK’s former chief drugs adviser has accused Gordon Brown of reclassifying cannabis for political reasons.** Prof David Nutt also predicted there would be further resignations from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs after he was made to quit as its head. The professor said Mr Brown had “made up his mind” to make cannabis a Class B drug, despite evidence to the contrary.

The home secretary said he had “lost confidence” in Prof Nutt, accusing him of “lobbying for a change in policy”.

Earlier this week, Prof Nutt used a lecture at King’s College, London, to say that smoking cannabis created only a “relatively small risk” of psychotic illness and it was actually less harmful than nicotine or alcohol. But on Friday he was forced to quit after receiving a letter from Home Secretary Alan Johnson who said his comments had undermined the scientific independence of the council.

**‘Absurd’**

Prof Nutt told the BBC the government had ignored advice on cannabis “on the whim of the prime minister”. “Until Gordon Brown took office there has never been a recommendation about drug classification from the council that has been rejected by government,” he said.

**“I think it’s a lack of courage from government that is a big issue here ”**

Sir David King Former government chief scientific adviser

“Gordon Brown comes into office and soon after that he starts saying absurd things like cannabis is lethal... it has to be a Class B drug. He has made his mind up. “We went back, we looked at the evidence, we said, ‘No, no, there is no extra evidence of harm, it’s still a Class C drug.’“He said, “Tough, it’s going to be Class B.” Prof Nutt said drug laws should not be influenced “petty party politics” and compared them to interest rates, which are set by the Bank of England not the government. In the same way, he said, an independent committee should be set up to rule on drug classifications. “There’s no point in having drug laws that are meaningless and arbitrary just because politicians find it useful and expedient occasionally to come down hard on drugs. (news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8335189.stm)

“That’s undermining the whole purpose of the drugs laws.”

“I think that the government has lacked courage in backing David’s committee’s advice,” Sir David said. “I think it’s a lack of courage from government that is a big issue here.”

14. Tim Newburn noted that “I am also intrigued that those who argue that criminology has had precious little, or at least insufficient impact in recent times, tend to ignore the likes of James Q. Wilson, George Kelling, and others as if they were not engaged in public criminology. We may not always care for what they say, but say it they have and, I’d argue, been spectacularly influential” (T. Newburn, personal communication, April 10, 2010).

departments, political parties, criminal justice agencies, the mass media, and something reified as public opinion—the potential collaborators or censors who require the uttering of particular forms of words in exchange for their approval and cooperation. They are part of a process of *courtship*. Any sociologist or criminologist who tries to interpret them without a nuanced appreciation of such diplomacy will attain only a very partial reading of what—literally and metaphorically—is at stake. In that sense, policy making is a matter of alliances and dowries, and criminological bride-wealth always might not be enough to tempt the nervous politician and official.

10. It is the big battalions of the criminal justice system who count. Minor audiences might be ignored. But it is obvious that times and places *do* exist in which the role of the lesser institutions of the state and of civil society can be politically significant and that also might be a matter of diplomacy as well as of functional relevance. This situation can be the case especially, say, in federal systems where proposals by central government might require a demonstration of a strong general will to counter claims that it has no legitimate case to intervene in local matters. A clamor from private sector organizations always can be invoked as evidence that provinces or states are trying to override manifest popular demand for change and that clamor, from time to time, might be amplified by a state that funds private organizations to badger it into action. Sometimes, indeed, those private organizations might be *created* or refurbished by the state precisely to create an impression of strong external pressure. Here it is that criminology itself might play its part as an authority that can be invoked or a discipline that might be put to use in what Weick (1979) would call the enacting of an environment, although its role might take odd forms as it is incorporated into the emerging politics of the moment. The first crime surveys, for instance, were justified in Canada as a means of measuring violence after the abolition of capital punishment (Rock, 1986) and in England and Wales as a measure of “doing something” on the heels of a spate of urban riots (Rock, 1990).

### Conclusion

A public criminology then might play but a small role in what is at bottom an ineluctably political process. It might enter as part of the rhetoric of justifications that can be cited (particularly if it says the right things and appears at just the right moment to be appropriated in argument), it might underwrite some part of the rituals of rationality that publicly sustain organizations (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), and it might check more egregious ideas, but policy submissions are not academic papers and political decisions are not academic decisions.

In his somewhat bleak contribution to an inquest on a substantial British piece of evidence-based policy making and program implementation, the 2002 Crime Reduction Programme—a program that, it was commonly agreed, had failed<sup>15</sup>—Tim Hope (2004: 287, 302) remarked:

The outcome for evidence-based policy making . . . is that scientific discourse and method itself falls victim to policy pressures and values. . . a government responding to a political mandate—for instance, “tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime”—is likely to be on the look out for ideas, evidence, even legitimacy, to substantiate its promise.

The gloominess of his postmortem verdict was to be reciprocated by a government that increasingly came to distance itself from academic criminology—public or otherwise. A boundary had been crossed, and criminology and policy making have drawn apart. If criminologists were jaundiced about the program, then it was the government’s own view that the *researchers* had failed, and according to Newburn (in press), the following two consequences occurred:

First, and predictably, it led to disillusionment within the Home Office of university-based research, as illustrated both by the expressed views of senior officials . . . and, in part, by the increasing willingness to turn to consultants and other outside contractors rather than university-based researchers. Second, it led Ministers quickly to temper their faith in research.

A public criminology is not impossible. Nor should attempts to establish it cease, but it would not do to expect too much or too naïvely, and it is salutary to recall how research and evidence continually tend to be rebuffed, filleted, appropriated, or reinterpreted in an intensely political environment. A public criminology must be reflexive about itself, its possibilities, and the world on which it seeks to act. Without something resembling an insider’s understanding of the criminal justice policy-making process, we can have no proper conception of the impact we might make. To be sure, in David Downes’ words, it always might not be practicable, responsible, or necessary to wait for that understanding before speaking out on some issue or other. That would, he remarked, be “as stifling as the revolutionary left’s refusal ever to say what they might have in mind after the deluge” (D. Downes, personal communication, April 15, 2010). But a public criminology that is ill informed about the dynamics of policy formation might have to acknowledge that it has exposed itself to the risk of disappointment.

---

15. Newburn (in press) quoted Mike Hough’s introduction to the special issue of *Criminal Justice* in which the inquest was published; the criminological researchers commissioned to undertake the evaluations, Hough remarked, “consumed a large amount of public money to mount research that yielded lower benefits than expected either by ourselves or our funders.”



## References

- Becker, Howard S. 1967. Whose side are we on? *Social Problems*, 14: 239–247.
- Boyd-Caine, Tessa. 2010. *Protecting the Public?: Executive Discretion and the Release of Mentally Disordered Offenders*. Cullompton, U.K.: Willan.
- Box, Steven. 1983. *Power, Crime, and Mystification*. London, U.K.: Routledge.
- Braithwaite, John. 2000. The new regulatory state and the transformation of criminology. *British Journal of Criminology*, 40: 222–238.
- Burawoy, Michael. 2005. For public sociology: Contradictions, dilemmas, and possibilities. *American Sociological Review*, 70: 4–28.
- Center for Research on Criminal Justice. 1975. *The Iron Fist and the Velvet Glove: An Analysis of the U.S. Police*. Berkeley, CA: Author.
- Cicourel, Aaron and John Kitsuse. 1963. *The Educational Decision-Makers*. Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill.
- Clark, Lorenne and Debra Lewis. 1977. *Rape: The Price of Coercive Sexuality*. Toronto, Canada: The Women's Press.
- Clear, Todd R. and Natasha Frost. 2008. Rules of engagement: Criminology and criminal justice policy. *Criminal Justice Matters*, 72: 37–38.
- Clear, Todd R. 2010. Policy and evidence: The challenge to the American Society of Criminology: 2009 Presidential Address the American Society of Criminology. *Criminology*, 48: 701–725.
- Cleveland Foundation. 1922. *Criminal Justice in Cleveland. Reports of the Cleveland Foundation Survey of the Administration of Criminal Justice in Cleveland*. Cleveland, OH: Cleveland Foundation.
- Department for Constitutional Affairs. 2005. *Hearing the Relatives of Murder and Manslaughter Victims*. Retrieved November 6, 2009 from [dca.gov.uk/consult/manslaughter/manslaughter.htm](http://dca.gov.uk/consult/manslaughter/manslaughter.htm).
- DiMaggio, Paul and Walter Powell. 1983. The iron cage revisited: institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48: 147–160.
- Economic and Social Research Council. 2010. Retrieved March 23, 2010 from [esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/about/](http://esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/about/).
- European Commission. 2002. *Reinforcement of the Rule of Law: Final Report of the First Part of the Project*. Phare Horizontal Programme on Justice and Home Affairs. Leiden, The Netherlands: The Centre for International Legal Cooperation.
- Ford Foundation. 2010. Retrieved March 4, 2010 from [fordfound.org/about](http://fordfound.org/about).
- Foucault, Michel. 1979. *Discipline and Punish*. Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin.
- Gardiner, John. 1967. Wincanton: The politics of corruption. In *Task Force Report: Organized Crime*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Hall, Stuart, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John N. Clarke, and Brian Roberts. 1993. *Policing the Crisis*. London, U.K.: Macmillan.

- Hillyard, Paddy, Joe Sim, Steve Tombs, and Dave Whyte. 2004. Leaving a “stain upon the silence”: Contemporary criminology and the politics of dissent. *British Journal of Criminology*, 44: 369–390.
- Home Office. 2010. *Rds about rds*. Retrieved March 6, 2010 from [homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/aboutrds1.html](http://homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/aboutrds1.html).
- Hope, Tim. 2004. Pretend it works: Evidence and governance in the evaluation of the reducing burglary initiative. *Criminal Justice*, 4: 287–308.
- Hough, Mike. 2010. Gold standard or fool’s gold? The pursuit of certainty in experimental criminology. *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 10: 11–22.
- Jones, Trevor, Brian Maclean, and Jock Young. 1986. *The Islington Crime Survey: Crime, Victimization and Policing in Inner-City London*. Aldershot, U.K.: Gower.
- Loader, Ian and Richard Sparks. 2008. “What are we gonna do now?” Revisiting the public roles of criminology. *Criminal Justice Matters*, 72: 18-19.
- Madriz, Esther. 1997. Images of criminals and victims: A study on women’s fear and social control. *Gender & Society*, 11: 342–356.
- Mandelson. 2009. Retrieved March 7, 2010 from [bis.gov.uk/mandelson-outlines-future-of-higher-education](http://bis.gov.uk/mandelson-outlines-future-of-higher-education).
- Manning, Peter. 1975. Deviance and dogma: Some comments on the labeling perspective. *British Journal of Criminology*, 15: 1-20.
- Marris, Peter and Martin Rein. 1974. *Dilemmas of Social Reform*. Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin.
- Mathiesen, Thomas. 1974. *The Politics of Abolition*. Oslo, Norway: Universitetsforlaget.
- Matza, David. 1969. *Becoming Deviant*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- McDonald, Lynn. 1976. *The Sociology of Law and Order*. Montreal, Canada: Book Center.
- Mills, C. Wright. 1943. The professional ideology of social pathologists. *American Journal of Sociology*, 49: 165–180.
- Ministry of Justice. 2008. *Court Statements for Families of Murder Victims ‘a Success’ Says New Report*. Retrieved November 20, 2008 from [justice.gov.uk/news/newsrelease301008a.htm](http://justice.gov.uk/news/newsrelease301008a.htm)
- Mobilization for Youth. 1960. *A Proposal for the Prevention of Delinquency by the Expansion of Opportunities*. New York: Author.
- National Institute of Justice. 2010. Retrieved March 3, 2010 from [ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/about/welcome.htm](http://ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/about/welcome.htm).
- Newburn, Tim. Criminology and Government: Some Reflections on Recent Developments in England. In (Mary Bosworth and Carolyn Hoyle, eds.) *What is Criminology?* Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press. In press.
- Nuffield Foundation. 2010. Retrieved March 3, 2010 from [nuffieldfoundation.org/go/aboutus/page\\_139.html](http://nuffieldfoundation.org/go/aboutus/page_139.html).
- Phillips, Cyril Sir. 1981. *Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure* (Cmnd 8092). London, U.K.: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office.
- Reiman, Jeffrey. 1979. *The Rich get Richer and the Poor get Prison*. New York: Wiley.

- Rock, Paul. 1986. *A View from the Shadows: The Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada and the Justice for Victims of Crime Initiative*. Oxford U.K.: Clarendon Press.
- Rock, Paul. 1990. *Helping Victims of Crime: The Home Office and the Rise of Victim Support in England and Wales*, Oxford, U.K.: Clarendon Press.
- Rock, Paul. 1996. *Reconstructing a Women's Prison: The Holloway Redevelopment Project, 1968–88*. Oxford, U.K.: Clarendon Press.
- Rock, Paul. 2004. *Constructing Victims' Rights: The Home Office, New Labour and Victims*. Oxford, U.K.: Clarendon Press.
- Rock, Paul. 2010. "Hearing victims of crime": The delivery of impact statements as ritual behaviour in four London trials for murder and manslaughter. In (Anthony Bottoms and Julian Roberts, eds.), *Hearing the Victim: Adversarial Justice, Crime Victims and the State*. Cullompton, U.K.: Willan.
- Scruton, Phil. 2001. A response to Lynch and the Schwendingers. *The Critical Criminologist*, 11: 2–3.
- Schutz, Alfred. 1967. Common-sense and scientific interpretation of human action. In (Maurice Natanson, ed.), *Alfred Schutz: Collected Papers*, vol. 1. The Hague, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Uggen, Christopher and Michelle Inderbitzin. 2010. Public Criminologies. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Weick, Karl. 1979. *The Social Psychology of Organizing*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Young, Jock. 2004. Voodoo criminology and the numbers game. In (Jeff Ferrell, Keith Hayward, Wayne Morrison, and Mike Presdee, eds.), *Cultural Criminology Unleashed*. London, U.K.: Glasshouse.
- Zimring, Franklin E. 2007. *The Great American Crime Decline*. New York: Oxford University Press.

---

**Paul Rock** FBA FRSA is Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the London School of Economics and Visiting Professor of Criminology at the University of Pennsylvania. In 1996, he was a Fellow of the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences; and in 2005 was a Visiting Fellow of the Regulatory Institutions Network, REGNET, at the Australian National University. In 2001–2002, he was key expert for the European Community's Phare Horizontal Programme, reporting on the treatment of victims and witnesses in the ten accession states. His interests focus on the development and implementation of criminal justice policies, particularly for victims of crime, but he has also published articles and books on criminological theory and the history of crime. His most recent books are *Constructing Victims' Rights* (September 2004, Clarendon Press) and *Crime, Victimisation and Criminological Theory*, (a volume in the *Pioneers in Contemporary Criminology* series), Ashgate, Farnham, 2010. He is currently working with Professors Tim Newburn and David Downes on the official history of criminal justice in England and Wales.



# POLICY ESSAY

---

## PUBLIC CRIMINOLOGIES

### Who will be the public criminologists? How will they be supported?

**Kenneth C. Land**

*Duke University*

Uggen and Inderbitzin (2010, this issue) have written an excellent article on the subject of public criminologies. The article covers a large array of topics on this subject, is well informed with many citations to prior relevant literature, and gives a broad survey of the current status of the field and its relationship to public sociology. I have little to add on many of these topics. I do, however, want to pick up on two topics discussed in the article.

The first question is as follows: Who will be the public criminologists? Given the diversity of ways of conducting public criminology identified in the article, there will, no doubt, be many paths by which professional, policy, and critical criminologists can enter into the public criminology domain. With regard to media presentations/representations of criminology expertise and findings, a principal means by which criminology will become public, at least for the foreseeable future, likely will be similar to what has been the case in recent years—consultations, comments, and quotations from one or more of our colleagues on the role of criminologist-as-expert when, say, the annual Uniform Crime Reports data on crime in the United States are released. Or perhaps when a local community story on crime, policing, or punishment—sometimes sparked by a criminal incident—is covered. Who among us has not read media stories in which one of our colleagues is quoted? And our reaction is: “Oh, I know her/him (and her/his work).” No doubt, this will continue to be a major form by which criminological knowledge and expertise is presented to the public.

Can more be done? Much of the article addresses the possibilities for doing more. One aspect that needs additional attention, however, is the question of how to create institutional structures to support public criminologists outside of academia. As Uggen and Inderbitzin (2010) note, few structural incentives exist for those of us in the academy to practice public criminology on more than an occasional criminologist-as-expert basis. Thus, the second question is as follows: How can full-time public criminology—public criminology as a career—be supported?

---

Direct correspondence to Kenneth C. Land, Department of Sociology, Duke University, Box 90088, Durham, NC 27708 (e-mail: kland@soc.duke.edu).

We need, and, more generally, the American Society of Criminology needs, to think creatively about how we can create institutional infrastructures—in the form of free-standing institutes or “think tanks” that can support at least a small number of full-time public criminologists—including those who come from the professional, policy, and critical wings of our community. Another possibility is to work with well-established existing institutes or foundations in Washington, DC, or other cities to create staff positions for individuals with criminological expertise. Because such organizations tend to have a primary focus on the economy or politics, however, it is likely the case that the best that can be gained in such organizations is a single position for a public criminologist. Thus, we should think seriously about how to construct (and gain the financial basis/endowment/funding for) institutes with staff members devoted to public presentations and commentaries on topics in crime, criminal justice, and punishment.

If the American Society of Criminology, perhaps in partnership with other professional organizations such as the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, created such an institute, then its staff members could draw on the work of professional criminologists to create a Research Briefs series of bulletins that summarize major research advances on crime, criminals, community responses, and so on by professional criminologists; a Policy Briefs series that does the same for research by policy criminologists on policing, criminal justice, sentencing, and so on; and a Conceptualizing Crime and Justice Briefs series based on critical criminology studies. The public criminologists housed in such an institute could perform many of the other functions described in the article by Uggen and Inderbitzin (2010). Given that we live in an era in which “evidence-based public policy” is increasingly put forward as desirable, the prospects for such an institute seem to be good.

## Reference

Uggen, Christopher and Michelle Inderbitzin. 2010. Public Criminologies. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.

---

**Kenneth C. Land** is the John Franklin Crowell Professor of Sociology and Demography at Duke University. He is a fellow of the American Society of Criminology. His research interests are in the development of mathematical and statistical models and methods for substantive applications in demography, criminology, and social indicators/quality-of-life studies. Known in criminology for his work on unemployment and crime rate fluctuations, structural covariates of crime rates, and finite mixture models of delinquent/criminal careers, he is the author or co-author of more than 150 articles, chapters, and books.

# POLICY ESSAY

---

## PUBLIC CRIMINOLOGIES

### What is to be done with public criminology?

**Ian Loader**

*University of Oxford*

**Richard Sparks**

*University of Edinburgh*

Christopher Uggen and Michelle Inderbitzen's (2010, this issue) article on "Public Criminologies" is timely and important. The issues it deals with concerning the place and purpose of criminology—indeed, the social sciences generally—in civil society and public policy formation are of long-standing interest and great significance today. The question of the civic missions of the social sciences has exercised and vexed their practitioners ever since their foundation (e.g., Gans, 1989; Wright Mills, 1959). It also has been dusted down and addressed anew in the debate prompted by Michael Burawoy's (2005) effort to articulate and defend "public sociology"—a debate that, as Uggen and Inderbitzen well illustrate, now has found its way into criminology. But these issues have a particularly long provenance and a special purchase in criminology, a field constituted around a social problem and of acute interest to governments, justice practitioners, and citizens alike. It is simply a social fact that criminology historically has tended to attract to its ranks individuals who combine intellectual curiosity and a thirst for knowledge with a reformist ambition of some kind (to prevent crime, rehabilitate offenders, improve the quality of justice, or in some allied way, alleviate avoidable human suffering). It is thus hardly surprising to find the dilemmas raised by the public sociology debate receiving the kind of extended airing inside criminology that Uggen and Inderbitzen have given them or that the general question of how criminological knowledge can (more) effectively inform public policy on crime and justice is just now attracting rather a lot of interest (Clear, 2010).

We are broadly welcoming of the idea of criminology as a field of engaged social inquiry and think much can be gained from sustained reflection on how criminologists can intervene best in societal conversations and social action around their subject matter. Indeed, we recently have completed a book dealing with these very questions (Loader and Sparks, 2010). But such

---

Direct correspondence to Ian Loader, Centre for Criminology, Manor Road Building, Manor Road, Oxford OX1 3UQ (e-mail: [ian.loader@crim.ox.ac.uk](mailto:ian.loader@crim.ox.ac.uk)); Richard Sparks, Law School, University of Edinburgh, Old College, South Bridge, Edinburgh EH8 9YL (e-mail: [r.sparks@ed.ac.uk](mailto:r.sparks@ed.ac.uk)).

willingness to embrace criminology's public purpose should not, and need not, come at the expense of continuing to exercise a critically reflexive orientation toward the issues at stake. What matters is not just getting on and *doing* something called public criminology (whatever that might turn out to mean) or encouraging and organizing others in the field to do the same. It is equally important to think sociologically *about* the phenomenon of "public criminology" and the range of questions that circulate around it. It is this broad spirit—one seeking to appraise the risks and opportunities that attend the idea of public criminology—that informs our reaction to Uggen and Inderbitzen's (2010) spirited and engaging article. One looming risk, as we see it, is of turning inward and becoming mired in discussions that only ever are going to be of much interest to criminologists (how ironic it would be if a debate about *public* criminology ended up taking this form). The chief opportunity is to think afresh, in the altered contexts of the present, about how best to make intelligible and coherent the idea of criminology as a civic enterprise.

### Turning Inward: On a Division of Public Criminology and Related Dangers

The idea of public criminology has surfaced of late in several places, of which Uggen and Inderbitzen's (2010) article is but the latest.<sup>1</sup> In the United States and in the United Kingdom, it has been the subject of articles (Groombridge, 2007), the rousing conclusions of two recent books (Carrabine, Iganski, Lee, Plummer, and South, 2008: 452–454; Hughes, 2007: ch. 8), and a special issue of *Theoretical Criminology* (Chancer and McLaughlin, 2007). This attention has been a response in part to the aforementioned debate on public sociology on which Uggen and Inderbitzen and many other recent contributors explicitly draw. But it also clearly is animated by a concern that the field of criminology has in recent years been a "successful failure" (Loader and Sparks, 2010: ch. 1). The worry expressed by this term is that the flourishing of criminology when measured using the standard yardsticks of jobs, degree programs, conferences, journals, publications, prizes, and so on has coincided with a waning of influence over crime and penal policy that has come in recent decades to be driven more by popular emotion and political calculation than by reason and evidence. The flurry of interest in public criminology, one feels, is driven by a desire to address this situation and lay renewed claim to the field's social relevance.

This context of emergence helps to account for some typical features of how the idea of public criminology is discussed. First of all, contributors to the debate generally have been making an explicit case *for* something called public criminology, and Uggen and Inderbitzen (2010) are certainly no exception to this trend. In many respects, nothing is wrong with such advocacy, and much about the case being made is attractive. However, it does run the risk of

---

1. Although to be fair, their article first was presented in 2006 and has been available ever since on the public criminology blog that Uggen hosts—see [publiccriminology.blogspot.com/](http://publiccriminology.blogspot.com/). One should note that the term "public criminology" was championed— even prior to Burawoy's intervention—by Carrabine, Lee, and South (2000), and that it connects with and takes up themes that Gregg Barak and others have been developing for some time in their work on "newsmaking criminology" (Barak, 1988, 2007). We also have made several previous attempts to address the issues at stake (Garland and Sparks, 2000; Loader, 1997; Loader and Sparks, 1993, 2004).



exhortation and sermonizing when what is called for is more patient analysis of why criminological engagement matters and what the obstacles and opportunities involved look like. Such exhortation also might invite a kind of prickly defensiveness among readers who feel (rightly or otherwise) that their preferred way of doing criminology is being called into question as well as unleashing a bid to defend “professional” criminology of the kind that has predominated in the critical debate prompted in sociology by Michael Burawoy (see, among many, Tittle, 2005; Turner, 2005).

Second, a tendency exists to import uncritically into criminology Burawoy’s four-fold typology of “professional,” “policy,” “critical,” and “public” sociologies. In their essay, Uggen and Inderbitzen (2010) proceed largely along these lines, setting out what the equivalent criminologies would look like and even giving each an allotted task—“assembling social facts and situating crime in disciplinary knowledge” (professional criminology), “evaluating social interventions” (policy criminology), “reconsidering rule making” (critical criminology), and “evaluating and reframing cultural images of the criminal” (public criminology). This way of proceeding is not, in our judgment, terribly helpful, and Uggen and Inderbitzen implicitly seem to realize the dangers of this typology and go on to describe how each of the four criminologies fruitfully might overlap. The dangers have to do with placing (even forcing) authors or works into different boxes, of encouraging the view that each stance is a mutually exclusive criminological identity, and of suggesting that “public criminology” is a distinct position that criminologists might or might not choose to adopt. These are outcomes that it is wise to avoid. Although Uggen and Inderbitzen have moderated the dangers involved here by transmuted the fractious typology into a more harmonious division of labor, this arrangement does not in itself overcome the problems associated with thinking about these issues “typologically” in the first place.

In this context, it is worth recalling that the call to practice something called public criminology is raised from within a field that for a long time has been and remains internally diverse, fragmented, and often fractious (Ericson and Carriere, 1994). Criminology is a field of inquiry marked by a disputatious plurality of theoretical assumptions and perspectives, by affiliations to different surrounding disciplines, by a wide range of objects of interest and enquiry, by competing methodologies and ways of knowing, and by a range of different styles of criminological engagement. Uggen and Inderbitzen’s (2010) article confirms this very point, making reference not only to the aforementioned professional, policy, critical, and public criminologies but also to “convict,” “administrative,” “airport,” and “antiseptic” criminology. The salient differences of focus and purpose in the field are given institutional expression in the American Society of Criminology’s (ASC) aptly named *divisions* of corrections and sentencing, critical criminology, international criminology, people and color, women and crime, and now experimental criminology. Cognate differentiations are found in the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (which has nine “sections”) and the European Society of Criminology (with nine “working groups”).

Of course, nothing is very unusual or surprising about the range of groups, organizations, networks, conferences, and journals that now make up the field of criminology; they are valuable, even indispensable, to the production and discussion of knowledge. Nonetheless a potential

pathology persists in all this. As criminology expands and fragments, and the fragments come to exist in a state of passive toleration, it runs the risk of “fixing” these divisions as if they were settled or “natural” and hence of either leaving intact or underscrutinized the mainstream “core” (the one that does not require its own division) or denying that the field has any core concerns or agreed upon body of knowledge at all. It risks positing these various subfields as incommensurable, hermetically sealed clusters of activity that have nothing to learn from each other and between which criminological practitioners (and prospective users of their knowledge) must simply choose. The result, at least potentially, is a series of criminologies that pass like ships in the night—an outcome that might cocoon discrete approaches to, or areas of, criminological inquiry from wider currents of thought and criticism as well as undermine the field’s legitimacy and overall sense of public purpose.

Given this institutional backdrop, and the enthusiasms of some of its adherents, public criminology clearly is at risk of becoming the latest shiny criminological brand, a perspective within the field that seduces and attracts some to its creed while being ignored or derided by others. One even can imagine—heaven forbid—it taking institutional shape as a new ASC division! Uggen and Inderbitzen’s (2010) contribution is at its least persuasive when it leans in this direction. They write, for example, of the “distinctiveness” of public criminology and of the things that “public criminologists” can and should do. They argue that public criminology is an “ideal and practice” based on “personal conviction and sacrifice,” suggest that more scholars might choose to pursue public criminology and evince the hope that “the field” will continue to expand.

It might be that more extensive and convincing criminological engagement with politics and civil society requires impetus and organization of this kind. But there are nonetheless problems with articulating the case in this way. It seems to us that “public criminology” makes the most sense as an umbrella under which it becomes possible to reexamine and foster serious consideration of a set of puzzles and predicaments that vex many criminologists today, from whatever perspective they approach the study of crime and justice. Foremost among these issues are questions of how to reconcile autonomy with engagement and knowledge production with social relevance as well as how and where to make intelligible contributions to public conversations about crime. Such questions no longer admit easy answers in contexts in which the whole climate of policy formation has “heated up,” and reason and evidence competes with—and often loses out to—the clarion calls of a 24/7 media, the righteous anger of victims and those who claim to represent them, and the imperatives of political competition and expediency (Loader and Sparks, 2010: ch. 3). As such, they call for fresh thinking and debate about criminology and its public roles, not for something called public criminology to become a new specialist branch of criminological activity.

One virtue of Todd R. Clear’s recent ASC Presidential Address was that it recognized and addressed relevant issues in something approaching this way—as dilemmas for all those who study crime and justice, whether as criminologists or under some allied banner, not just for a committed band of “public” ones (Clear, 2010). Clear raises some important questions about

the opportunities for public engagement that confront criminology under the Obama Administration and how they might best be understood and grasped. He cautions criminologists to be wary of the conservative implications of demands for evidence and argues for a capacious conception of what can count as such.<sup>2</sup> He defends the value of basic research in underpinning what he calls “criminologically justifiable action” (Clear, 2010: 14) and makes clear that these matters deal with the collective organization of the field rather than simply with the preferences of individual criminologists.<sup>3</sup> He also raises for consideration the thorny question of whether the ASC, qua ASC, should seek to participate in policy-making arenas and even assume public postures on issues such as mass incarceration.

We have no definitive answers to the questions that Clear poses, nor do we have the space to develop them here. But perhaps the answers one arrives at are less crucial than the extent to which relevant issues are taken up and discussed, the spirit in which such discussion is conducted, and the institutional spaces we create in which to develop it. These issues, as we have indicated, can give rise to a parochial conversation that attracts much interest among criminologists but is scarcely likely to hold the attention of anyone else. They also can become—for want of a better word—“managerialized.” This situation is happening in current state-issued strictures about research “Impact” in the United Kingdom,<sup>4</sup> and looms in the wings whenever this subject is reduced to one of creating incentive structures for academics that recognize and reward public engagement. Or one can use public criminology as a springboard for thinking sociologically about the relationship between criminology and its “publics” and about how to make the idea of criminology as a civic enterprise intelligible and convincing in the altered conditions of the present. It is this latter project with which we have been engaged of late.

### **Reaching Outward: On Criminology as a Civic Enterprise**

The overarching “alteration” in the conditions in which criminologists seek to intervene has to do with a “heating up” of public discourse and social action in relation to crime. This term signifies that crime in many, but by no means all, contemporary democracies in recent years has become a prominent token of electoral competition and that governmental reactions to it are swayed heavily by political calculation and expediency. In this hotter climate, crime policy increasingly comes under the influence of mass media and “public opinion” and at the mercy

2. U.S. criminologists might learn something here from the enthusiasm with which many British criminologists greeted the election of Tony Blair in 1997 and what they thought was the advent of an era of “evidence-based policy.” The subsequent involvement of criminologists in seeking to give practical effect to this aspiration ended for several participants in frustration (see, e.g., Hope, 2004). In our view, the British experience underscores the importance of Clear’s constructively sceptical orientation toward the promise of evidence-based crime policy.
3. One might ask in this context whether professional criminology in the United States is well placed to rise to the challenges that Clear outlines. This issue is partly a matter of the narrow horizons and content of graduate education (a point that Burawoy made powerfully in relation to sociology) and partly about the effects of a system of tenure that seems designed—if we might venture an outsiders’ opinion—to stifle creativity, risk-taking, and public engagement.
4. For more on this situation, see [hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/impact/](http://hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/impact/).

of ill-informed and sometimes actively whipped-up popular emotion. The result is a policy environment that is volatile and unstable, one in which it becomes difficult to make reason and evidence the drivers of what is said and done (Loader and Sparks, 2010: ch. 3). These are, as we noted, the background conditions that have stirred interest in the whole question of public criminology.

What does it mean, though, for criminology to make intelligible contributions to public debate and policy formation in this more politicized environment—an environment in which *all* knowledge claims potentially also become politicized and controversial, all the more so when they address major cleavages of world view and ideological commitment (as criminology typically does)?<sup>5</sup> Our argument, which is elaborated more fully elsewhere (Loader and Sparks, 2010: ch. 5), is that we best can give coherence to criminology's civic purpose by understanding its role as one of seeking to foster and sustain better politics of crime and its regulation—or what we term *democratic underlaboring*.<sup>6</sup> Let us try to explain what we mean by this.

One common response from within criminology to the heating up of crime and penal policy is to try to “cool things down.” One suspects that part of what Todd R. Clear finds attractive about “today’s ‘evidentiary’ moment in time” (Clear, 2010: 2) is that it offers the opportunity, after several decades of politically driven and often ill-informed crime policy, to move things in a more rational direction. This direction is made more explicit in his concept of “*criminologically* justifiable action” (Clear, 2010: 14; emphasis added). In a similar spirit, Ugen and Inderbitzen (2010) argue that one of the tasks of a public criminology is “to challenge false statements, question shoddy evidence, and debunk harmful myths and scare tactics.” This concept is hardly new but rather expresses a criminological default position. To be a criminologist, to an important degree, is to have committed oneself already to the idea that crime problems can and should be subjected to reason, method, evidence, analysis, and knowledge and to have taken a stand against, or at least assumed some distance from, lay opinion and political judgment. It is thus often to have placed oneself on a collision course with social and political actors who advance their crime and justice projects in ignorance (willful or otherwise) of criminology's hard-earned lessons. Today, however, some criminologists aim to make a virtue of this underlying circumstance. Experimental criminologists defend and use a rigorous method for determining “what works, what doesn't work and what's promising” in crime prevention at least partly to expose politicians who waste tax dollars on programs driven not by evidence but by political and populist considerations (Sherman, Farrington, Welsh, and MacKenzie, 2002). They and others have in addition proposed creating institutions that can “reinsulate” crime policy from the “heat” of political combat and mass-mediated public demands. The hope is

---

5. See, on this, Weingart (1999).

6. This role of underlaborer is, of course, an antique one having been formulated originally by John Locke (1975 [1690]: 10) to describe the task of philosophy as “clearing the ground a little, and removing some of the Rubbish” vis à vis scientific knowledge. The revised term, democratic underlaboring, is borrowed from Swift and White (2008), who use it to describe the relation of political theory to real politics.

that in such institutions, scientific expertise and a calm bureaucratic ethos will deliver policy and practice that is underpinned by a reliable criminological evidence base (Sherman, 2009; see also Zimring and Johnson, 2006).

For us, limits as well as strengths are attached to this conception of criminology's civic role—limits that have to do with an inability to *explain* how criminological knowledge in fact fares in settings of contemporary policy formation and what often seems like an undefended desire to somehow *replace* politics with what Bruno Latour calls “calculative devices” (Latour, 2004). Instead, we think much can be gained not from treating criminology as an antidote to democratic politics but from trying to think afresh about criminology's relation to the present pathologies and unrealized promise of modern politics. In the former case, this mentality means trying to make good on the rather remote and thin understanding that criminology too often has of the world of practical affairs by fostering a better appreciation of the forces that shape the treatment of crime in the contemporary public sphere and the reasons why (social) scientific knowledge about crime does or does not get taken up and used in political debate and governmental action.<sup>7</sup> This process, in turn, means acquiring the will and the necessary tools to develop understanding of the “circumstances of politics” (Waldron, 1999: 106) and cultivating a “qualified tolerance” toward those who practice politics as a vocation (Swift and White, 2008: 64). This idea does not, however, mean reconciling oneself to the status quo. In the latter case, reappraisal means reconnecting with and developing those strands of thought that have insisted that crime is “political” (Taylor, Walton, and Young, 1973) and making explicit the connections that inescapably exist between crime and its control and the repertoire of ideas (order, justice, authority, legitimacy, freedom, rights, etc.) and traditions (liberalism, but also conservatism, social democracy, feminism, republicanism, environmentalism, etc.) that comprise modern political thought. It involves folding into our understanding of criminological research and public engagement the fact that any discussion of the criminal question encodes in miniature a set of claims about the nature of the good society, and any attempt to answer it, however apparently “dry,” technical, or limited in scope, carries and projects a possible world, a desirable state of affairs that a political or criminological actor wishes to usher into existence.

To think again and in these ways about the intersections between criminology and politics does not dispose of, or render secondary, the question of *knowledge* and its uses. Having indicated why criminologists might understand better the pathologies of modern politics and be clearer about the relationship of their work to its ideals and possibilities, another set of questions shuffles into view. As we have intimated, most individuals who spend their time or, in many instances, the greater part of their working lives, practicing criminology or an allied craft do so because they believe that acquiring knowledge about crime, or justice, or punishment has some value. It also seems safe to suppose that they think the knowledge they produce and disseminate has a quality—a methodological rigor, respect for evidence, or theoretical acuity that enables it to

7. It usefully might take its cue here from some recent work within political science; see, for example, Miller (2008).

unearth things about the world or see that world in a revised light—that sets it apart from other claims about crime and its control, such as those claims circulated by politicians, journalists, bloggers, victims groups, offenders, police officers, campaigners, or simply citizens engaged in daily conversation. But what exactly is this “expertise” and what value and place does it have? Here the following questions begin to emerge: What contribution can criminological knowledge make to shaping responses to crime in a polity that acknowledges crime and punishment to be properly political issues? What in a democracy is the public value of criminology? What is the collective good that criminological enquiry seeks to promote (Kitcher, 2001)? What modes of intervention and what institutional arrangements best can realize that good?

To practice criminology as a democratic underlaborer is to be committed, first and foremost, to the generation of knowledge rather than (first and foremost) to scoring a point or winning a policy battle; if the distinction between criminologist and activist is to mean anything, then it must entail something of this kind. What then of the question of public intervention in disputes about crime? We have three points to make on this. We hope that many criminologists, of diverse persuasions, and certainly those who have thought most concertedly about these matters, such as Uggen and Inderbitzen (2010), would feel able to agree with most of these. The first is that engaging in public life—being “political” in some broad sense—does not mean reducing the question of crime to one of political preference, nor positing criminologists as quasi-politicians, nor celebrating folk wisdom over professional judgment and hard-won knowledge. Our task is to be bearers and interpreters of that knowledge and to bring it to bear on matters of public concern and dispute, hence, the importance of a scholarly “formative intention” (Collins and Evans, 2007). Second, this concept does not reduce what criminologists can bring to public debate to matters of evidence narrowly construed. It seems clear that academic criminologists enjoy a degree of freedom that many participants in political and professional struggles over crime and justice lack. They have a certain liberty to refuse to take the social world for granted or to accept received political “imperatives,” to provoke and unsettle, and to pose questions about our responses to crime that security-obsessed and ideology-lite political cultures increasingly seem to have forgotten how to ask. Being critical in *this* sense properly forms part of the social scientist’s DNA (cf. Ericson, 2005). It means that that they can and should bring to public discussion a skepticism that refuses to treat at face value the categories, assumptions, and self-understandings that make up prevailing “common sense” about crime and its control. It also enables them to theorize and set forth alternative institutional arrangements for thinking about and responding to crime and to forge connections with groups in civil society (and *not* simply government) who are seeking to advance a better, or alternative, justice policy. Third, in doing so, criminologists have to give up an illusion of mastery in which they somehow expect their knowledge to engineer outcomes, end political discussion, and trump the ill-informed concerns and perspectives of others. The public role of criminology involves generating controversy, opening up and extending debate, as well as challenging and provoking received public “opinion” and political postures, not closing such discourse down.

Democratic underlaboring is, then, a disposition and a practice whose formative intention is the production of rigorous knowledge but which understands itself as engaging with a field in which applications of that knowledge never reduce to simple and transparent calculations. Criminology inhabits and intervenes in a world composed not simply of “matters of fact” over which it can legislate, but also always one of disputed “matters of concern” (Latour, 2004) that it can, alongside the various “publics” who assemble around such matters, legitimately interpret and contest. The criminologist as a democratic underlaborer has a commitment both to generating and disseminating knowledge *and* to a more deliberative politics of big public questions such as the future of punishment and crime control. She is, as such, necessarily implicated in developing what has been called “argumentative” or “intelligent” rather than simply “evidence-based” public policy making.<sup>8</sup> The underlaboring conception of criminology is committed to participating within and to facilitating and extending institutional spaces that supplement representative politics with inclusive public deliberation about crime and justice matters, whether in local, state, or federal settings or across emergent transnational arenas. In this regard, the public value of criminology as democratic underlaboring lies not primarily in “cooling” down controversies about crime and social responses to it so much as in playing its part in figuring out ways to bring their “heat” within practices of democratic governance.

## References

- Barak, Gregg. 1988. Newsmaking criminology: Reflections on the media, intellectuals and crime. *Justice Quarterly*, 5: 565–585.
- Barak, Gregg. 2007. Doing newsmaking criminology from within the academy. *Theoretical Criminology*, 11: 191–209.
- Burawoy, Michael. 2005. For public sociology. *American Sociological Review*, 70: 4–28.
- Carrabine, Eamonn, Maggie Lee, and Nigel South. 2000. Social wrongs and human rights in late modern Britain: Social exclusion, crime control and prospects for a public criminology. *Social Justice*, 27: 193–211.
- Carrabine, Eamonn, Paul Iganski, Maggie Lee, Ken Plummer, and Nigel South. 2008. *Criminology: A Sociological Introduction*, 2nd Edition. New York: Routledge.
- Chancer, Lynn and Eugene McLaughlin. 2007. Public Criminologies: Diverse perspectives on academia and policy. *Theoretical Criminology*, 11: 155–173.
- Clear, Todd R. 2010. Policy and evidence: The challenge to the American Society of Criminology. *Criminology*, 48: 1–25.
- Collins, Harry and Robert Evans. 2007. *Rethinking Expertise*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Ericson, Richard. 2005. Publicizing sociology. *British Journal of Sociology*, 56: 365–372.
- Ericson, Richard and Kevin Carriere. 1994. The fragmentation of criminology. In (David Nelken, ed.), *The Futures of Criminology*. London, U.K.: Sage.

8. These coinages are taken, respectively, from Hoppe (1999) and Sanderson (2009).

- Gans, Herbert. 1989. Sociology in America: The discipline and the public. *American Sociological Review*, 54: 1–16.
- Garland, David and Richard Sparks. 2000. Criminology, social theory and the challenge of our times. In (David Garland and Richard Sparks, eds.), *Criminology and Social Theory*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press.
- Groombridge, Nic. 2007. Criminologists say . . . : An analysis of UK national press coverage of criminology and criminologists and a contribution to the debate on “public criminology.” *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 46: 459–475.
- Hope, Tim. 2004. Pretend it works: Evidence and governance in the evaluation of the Reducing Burglary Initiative. *Criminal Justice*, 4: 287–308.
- Hoppe, Robert. 1999. Policy analysis, science and politics: From “speaking truth to power” to “making sense together.” *Science and Public Policy*, 26: 201–10.
- Hughes, Gordon. 2007. *The Politics of Crime and Community*. Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave.
- Kitcher, Philip. 2001. *Science, Truth and Democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Latour, Bruno. 2004. *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- Loader, Ian. 1997. Criminology and the public sphere: Arguments for utopian realism. In (Paul Walton and Jock Young, eds.), *“The New Criminology” Revisited*. Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave.
- Loader, Ian and Richard Sparks. 1993. Ask the experts. *Times Higher Education Supplement*. April 16, p. 29.
- Loader, Ian and Richard Sparks. 2004. For an historical sociology of crime policy in England and Wales since 1968. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 7: 5–32.
- Loader, Ian and Richard Sparks. 2010. *Public Criminology?* New York: Routledge.
- Locke, John. 1975 (1690). *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press.
- Miller, Lisa. 2008. *The Perils of Federalism: Race, Poverty and the Politics of Crime Control*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sanderson, Ian. 2009. Intelligent policy making for a complex world: Pragmatism, evidence and learning. *Political Studies*, 57: 699–719.
- Sherman, Lawrence. 2009. Evidence and liberty: The promise of experimental criminology. *Criminology and Criminal Justice* 9: 5–28.
- Sherman, Lawrence, David P. Farrington, Brandon C. Welsh, and Doris L. MacKenzie, eds. 2002. *Evidence-Based Crime Prevention: Revised Edition*. New York: Routledge.
- Swift, Adam and Stuart White. 2008. Political theory, social science, and real politics. In (David Leopold and Marc Stears, eds.), *Political Theory: Methods and Approaches*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press.
- Taylor, Ian, Paul Walton, and Jock Young. 1973. *The New Criminology*. London, U.K.: Routledge.



- Tittle, Charles. 2004. The arrogance of public sociology. *Social Forces*, 82: 1639–1643.
- Turner, Jonathon. 2005. Is public sociology such a good idea? *The American Sociologist*, 36: 27–45.
- Uggen, Christopher and Michelle Inderbitzen. 2010. Public criminologies. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Waldron, Jeremy. 1999. *Law and Disagreement*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press.
- Weingart, Peter. 1999. Scientific expertise and political accountability: Paradoxes of science in politics. *Science and Public Policy*, 26: 151–161.
- Wright Mills, C. 1959. *The Sociological Imagination*. Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin.
- Zimring, Franklin E. and David Johnson. 2006. Public opinion and the governance of punishment in democratic political systems. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Social and Political Science*, 605: 265–280.

---

**Ian Loader** is a professor of criminology, the director of the Centre for Criminology at the University of Oxford, and a fellow of All Souls College. His books include *Crime and Social Change in Middle England* (Routledge, 2000; with Evi Girling and Richard Sparks), *Civilizing Security* (Cambridge University Press, 2007; with Neil Walker), *Public Criminology?* (Routledge, 2010; with Richard Sparks), and *Emotions, Crime and Justice* (Hart, 2010; coedited with Susanne Karstedt and Heather Strang). He currently is researching and writing about the consumption of security products.

**Richard Sparks** is a professor of criminology at the University of Edinburgh and is the codirector of the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research ([www.sccjr.ac.uk](http://www.sccjr.ac.uk)). His books include *Crime and Social Change in Middle England* (Routledge, 2000; with Evi Girling and Ian Loader), *Public Criminology?* (Routledge, 2010; with Ian Loader), and *Travels of the Criminal Question* (Hart, 2010; coedited with Dario Melossi and Maximo Sozzo). His current research interests include comparative and transnational aspects of public policy on crime and punishment.



## “Public criminology” and evidence-based policy

**Michael Tonry**

*University of Minnesota*

Christopher Uggen and Michelle Inderbitzin (2010, this issue) offer an insightful analysis of the possibilities and pitfalls facing criminologists who want to speak truth, effectively, to power, and to communicate effectively to the public and media. They offer a plausible taxonomy of scholarly divisions within criminology and describe, I think, correctly, a disciplinary history partly paralleling sociology's of a gradual retreat from engagement with public affairs into a more insulated existence as a profession characterized by sophisticated techniques and specialized vocabularies. They provide a full and rich description of the complexity of policy processes and of challenges facing efforts to bring systematic evidence and other fruits of research to public attention.

Uggen and Inderbitzin (2010) emphasize the roles and influence of academic criminologists, whereas my emphasis is on the policy processes and outcomes that they do and do not influence. Uggen and Inderbitzin discuss instances and policy realms when and in which research and researchers do influence policy and have for a long time. Even so, in their words and tone, the plaint persists that criminologists have less influence than they ought. If that were not true, then an impassioned plea for a stronger public criminology would be a surprising thing.

No doubt it is true that the fruits of some kinds of research do not have a great deal of influence on policy. It is also true, however, that some kinds of research, and many researchers, have had enormous influence on policy. Governments worldwide have paid attention to crime-prevention specialists—notably including Ronald V. Clarke, Marcus Felson, Jan van Dijk, Ken Pease, Michael Levi, and Patricia Mayhew—and have enacted and altered policies and practices as a result.<sup>1</sup> Policing scholars—notably including Herman Goldstein, Mark H. Moore, Larry

---

Direct correspondence to Michael Tonry, 312 Mondale Hall, 229 19th Avenue, South, Minneapolis, MN 55455 (e-mail: tonry001@umn.edu).

1. This and the subsequent lists of names are by no means meant to be exclusive. Others no doubt have played equally influential roles in the areas named as well as in other areas. The people named are simply those of whose work I have personal knowledge.

Sherman, Wesley G. Skogan, Steve Mastrofsky, David Weisburd, and James Q. Wilson—have been in the middle of successive transformations of American policing since the 1970s. John Braithwaite's work has stimulated the flowering of restorative justice programs worldwide as well as a shift in many countries away from law-enforcement-based deterrence strategies and toward collaborative compliance strategies to deal with environmental and other regulatory law breaking. The leading American drug-policy scholars—including notably Peter Reuter, Mark A.R. Kleiman, Jonathan Caulkins, and Robert MacCoun—are consulted regularly by drug-policy people and sometimes are listened to. Corrections policy makers have paid attention to Norval Morris, Daniel Glaser, Don M. Gottfredon, Joan Petersilia, Todd R. Clear and Michael E. Smith. In an earlier time, many states made wholesale changes in their sentencing laws to incorporate the ideas of Norval Morris, Marvin Frankel, and Andrew von Hirsch. More recently, several American states have changed their laws on felon disenfranchisement in reaction—in significant part—to the work of Marc Mauer, Christopher Uggen and Jeff Manza.

Two things stand out in the preceding paragraph's lists. Each person mentioned is a scholar of the first rank and is or was considered as such within the scholarly and disciplinary worlds of which he or she is a part. And, with the exceptions of Christopher Uggen and Jeff Manza, none of them are based in a university sociology department. The rest are or were based in government, public policy, and law schools and in criminology, criminal justice, economics, and political science departments. I do not know what to make of the second pattern; possibly the policy influence view is bleaker from sociology departments than from elsewhere.

Burawoy's (2004, 2005) influential articles calling for a reinvigorated public sociology serve as the framework for Uggen and Inderbitzin's (2010) article in this journal. Burawoy described a disciplinary history that began with engagement in the world of professional practice and ended with at least partial disengagement into a claustrophobic and self-referential academic world. The same thing probably has happened to some elements of modern American criminology. It is hard not to wonder when reading some *Criminology* articles, for example, whether they are not the works of people who carry statistical hammers and look for database nails to hit.

In the early 20th century, the leading European criminologists were based in universities but were engaged deeply with the world. Gabriel Tarde in France; Cesare Lombroso, Raffaele Gaolfalo, and Enrico Ferri in Italy; and Willem Bongers and Willem Pompe in the Netherlands all were concerned centrally with the criminal justice policies of their time. Ferri (1921) drafted a complete proposed criminal code for Italy predicated on then-current knowledge about recidivism prediction.

The same thing was true in the United States—but even more so. Thorsten Sellin, the distinguished professor of sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, was actively engaged in the 1930s and 1940s in policy debates concerning capital punishment and racial disparities in the justice system. The major figures in the first celebrated English-language criminology program at the University of Chicago were doing equivalent things. Ernest W. Burgess in the 1920s was laying a foundation for 50 years of quantitative research on parole decision making and recidivism prediction that provided Ph.D. topics for three generations of celebrated

sociologists—Lloyd Ohlin, Daniel Glaser, Dudley Duncan, and Albert J. Reiss, Jr., among them. Glaser and Ohlin each served as State Prison Actuary in Illinois (Harcourt, 2006). At the same time, Robert E. Park, Frederick Thrasher, Clifford Shaw, and William F. Whyte were writing classic works on gangs and on individual offenders based on the use of qualitative methods. Shaw and Benjamin McKay combined both approaches. Each spent much of his career working in the Chicago Area Project (Schlossman, 1985; Schlossman and Sedlak, 1983). Sheldon Glueck's (1952 [1927–1928]) delinquency studies were motivated in significant part to provide a knowledge base for his detailed proposals for the reform of sentencing.

Thus, a long and distinguished history prevails of what now might be called public criminology, and there is little reason why criminologists should not be more active in it now. Gaining influence and attention is not easy, but it can be done, as the balance of this essay shows.

Evidence sometimes influences criminal justice policies and practices. Other times, it does not. The reasons are usually straightforward. Some subjects raise powerful normative and ideological issues. Few officials, for example, are likely to base their support for or opposition to capital punishment on the evidence concerning its deterrent effects. Other policies in this category (they vary from country to country) include sex-offender registration and notification (“Megan’s laws”), life sentences without the possibility of parole, and—less dramatically—electronic monitoring and drug treatment involving heroin maintenance.

Policies and practices concerning some other subjects change quickly when credible evidence shows that new technologies or techniques are more efficient, effective, or cost-effective than current practices. Policy makers are often eager to learn from and use the fruits of work on situational crime prevention (e.g., Clarke, 1995). Incremental improvements in technology that make credit cards more secure (e.g., use of holograms) are adopted around the globe as fast as news about them can travel. Automobile ignition locks offer another example. Substantial declines in motor vehicle theft in many countries commonly are attributed largely to enactment of laws requiring installation of ignition locks in new cars. In countries that use electronic monitoring of convicted offenders, improved equipment is adopted as quickly as funding allows.

Policy-making permeability to evidence on a third, intermediate set of subjects varies with time and place. Community penalties offer a good example. German policy makers in the 1970s were receptive to evidence about the effectiveness of day fines as prison alternatives; Dutch policy makers in the 1980s and American and English policy makers in the 1990s were not. A similar story can be told about community service. Californian judges showed in the 1960s that it could (then) serve as a credible alternative to imprisonment. British and Dutch policy makers were impressed and quickly followed suit. Policy makers in Germany rejected community service as a form of constitutionally prohibited involuntary servitude. Likewise, in the face of evidence that electronic monitoring of offenders effectively can substitute for imprisonment, German policy makers, for a long time, rejected it as constituting an unacceptable invasion of privacy; American, English, and later Swedish policy makers had no such scruples.

The preceding paragraphs are at best mundane and at worst platitudinous. They are worth writing only to illustrate the silliness of many academics’ beating of breasts and gnashing of teeth

about officials' unwillingness to base policies and practices on evidence. Sometimes, on some subjects, in some places, policy makers and practitioners gratefully take account of evidence. Other times, on other subjects in other places, they do not.

Academics' complaints usually are directed at the most contentious and emotional issues—capital punishment, mandatory penalties, and long prison sentences—and the gravamen of the complaints is less that evidence has been ignored than that complainers disapprove of particular policies. We academics, however, have no special standing that entitles us to have our views given special weight. We are as entitled as anyone else to express our views about controversial issues, but we should do it on the basis that we favor or disapprove particular policies for empirical, policy, normative, or ideological reasons and not on the basis that officials have misread or disregarded the evidence or have not been guided by our wisdom.

On many subjects, however, evidence can and does influence policies and practices. Bureaucratic rationality was a defining characteristic of government for Max Weber and, in many governmental settings, is an ongoing aspiration. It is understandable that most researchers also subscribe to rationalistic views about evidence-based policy.

In the English-speaking countries, at least, the earliest criminology programs in universities and research units in governmental departments were created with the purpose of aiding in the formulation of evidence-based criminal justice policies.<sup>2</sup> The first, the School of Criminology at the University of California at Berkeley, was founded in 1950 under the leadership of August Vollmer, who combined a scholarly career with a professional career as a police executive in part from a “commitment to the extension and improvement of police training” (Morris, 1975: 127). The aim of the first Australian department, in Melbourne in 1951, was the “development of a research base on crime and punishment which might then inform more effective and just policy” (Finnane, 1998: 73). R.A. Butler—the English Home Secretary, who in the 1950s created the Home Office Research Unit and precipitated the formation in 1959 of the first British university-based criminology program at Cambridge—often spoke of his belief that research findings would show the way to the prevention of crime and the treatment of offenders (Hood, 2002; Radzinowicz, 1999).<sup>3</sup> Butler later observed that “The money spent on research . . . could be expected to earn ‘enormous dividends,’ not least by reducing crime” (Butler, 1974: 2). In the United States, the same aspiration suffused the pages of the report of the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (1967) and motivated the creation and enormous funding of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration.

2. This essay, alas, draws primarily on English language sources. The beginnings of American criminology in the early 20th century were influenced strongly by earlier developments in, especially, France, Germany, and Italy. Until the 1930s and 1940s (e.g., Edwin Sutherland, and Bernard and Eleanor Glueck), no English-language scholars were equivalent in influence to Cesare Lombroso, Enrico Ferri, Raffaele Garofalo, Gabriel Tarde, Willem Bongers, and Franz von Liszt. The institutionalization of criminology in universities occurred earlier in continental Europe than in the English-speaking countries, including most notably the establishment of criminology programs in universities throughout Belgium in the 1930s (Tonry, 2004a).
3. Mid- and long-term characterizations and assessments of these developments can be found in *festschriften* for Leon Radzinowicz (Hood, 1974) and Roger Hood (Zedner and Ashworth, 2003).

Similar aspirations existed and institutional developments occurred in many policy realms and in many countries in the 1950s and 1960s. Relatively quickly, it became clear that the relationship between scientific evidence and policy is complex. Evidence, although not irrelevant, is but one of many influences on policy making and often not a major one. Political considerations, public opinion, conventional wisdom, ideology, resource concerns, entrenched bureaucracies, and interest groups are always at least as important and often more important.

A scholarly literature on “research utilization” (horrible choice of terms) began to develop in the 1950s and 1960s and has continued to the present. It explores the questions of when, why, and under what circumstances evidence influences policy and practice. That literature generates four key observations. First, structural differences between the worlds of scholarship and government—including academic career structures and incentives and different notions of policy making—seriously complicate communication between the different worlds. Second, knowledge must pass successfully through a series of filters if it is to influence policy. Third, timing is everything; complexities of policy processes mean that policy makers are more and less receptive to influence. Sometimes “windows of opportunity” open through which knowledge can pass and influence major policy shifts. Other times the windows are closed firmly. Fourth, at particular times in particular places, the windows are wide open and remain open (in recent years, research on crime and human development offers many examples in many countries).

Here is how the rest of this essay is organized. I provide a brief overview of the research utilization literature in the next section as background to what follows. In the subsequent three sections, I discuss subject, time, and place. The final section offers concluding observations.

The most important conclusions are that Weber is right—many policy makers and practitioners much of the time, on many subjects want to act rationally, which means they want to take account of evidence. Linking knowledge to policy and practice, however, is a complex and contingent process. Policy makers and researchers have different conceptions of evidence and often have different notions of how policy processes do and should operate. The challenges of evidence-based policy making are different in policy and practice settings. In policy settings, they include the multiple agendas policy makers pursue and the multiple constituencies to which they relate. In practice settings, although multiple agendas and constituencies are also important, the challenges center on whether, how, and when practitioners learn about new evidence, whether managers are open to new ideas and can implement them, whether funding can be obtained, and whether inertia and comfortable, traditional ways of doing business with which line staff are familiar can be overcome. Put more succinctly, the problems at the policy level are political and at the practice level are managerial.

### “Research Utilization”

The literature on research utilization began to take shape in the 1950s and 1960s. A considerable body of work has accumulated. At least two major journals—*American Journal of Evaluation* and *Evidence and Policy*—specialize in the subject. It is an odd literature in that it is simultaneously mundane and creative.<sup>4</sup>

It is mundane in the sense that experienced policy makers, and others familiar with policy processes, will find little in it that is surprising. Few in either category will be surprised to learn that evidence seldom influences policy or practice directly. Officials must be aware of the evidence; they must consider it credible; they must regard its implications as important; they must believe the effort to change policies to take evidence into account is worth the hassle involved; and they must be able to overcome a series of political, ideological, and bureaucratic obstacles. In some policy realms, the obstacles are daunting, and in others, they are insuperable. Nothing surprising there.

It is creative in the sense that it provides frameworks and vocabularies that illuminate issues and aids in the understanding of why some attempts at change succeed and some fail. First, in the classic work on this subject, Charles Lindblom and David Cohen (1979) explored the ways learning generated by systematic research, which they called “professional social enquiry” (PSI), influences policy. PSI can influence policy, they say, only when “social learning” has occurred that can overcome the influence of “ordinary knowledge.” On important issues, change is difficult until social learning has produced new attitudes and political dispositions.

Second, Carole Weiss (1986) showed that in any place and time, boundaries exist beyond which change is not possible or even politically imaginable. She called this “boundedness.”

Third, David Green and I have shown the importance of “windows of opportunity” (Tonry and Green, 2003). Some policy options are politically or bureaucratically imaginable at some times but not at others. In what follows, I give examples from recent American history when political assassinations opened windows of opportunity through which evidence about the public health effects of handguns could pass and led to the enactment of gun control legislation.

Boundedness interacts with windows of opportunity. When windows of opportunity are circumscribed by boundedness in a particular place at a particular time, policy prescriptions that fail to take account of that—that attempt to push social learning beyond its boundaries—will not be taken seriously (Stolz, 2001).

Fourth, the influence of systematic evidence on policy depends on the permeability of a series of filters through which the evidence must pass (Tonry and Greene, 2003: 486–489). One is the filter of prevailing paradigms. Others are prevailing ideology, short-term political considerations, and short-term bureaucratic considerations (and inertia).

The research utilization literature does not instruct that evidence cannot influence policy, but that whether it can varies with time, space, and subject as well as with how astutely innova-

---

4. I do not discuss this literature in detail here. Such a discussion and citations to the most important sources can be found in Tonry and Green (2003).



tors operate within political and bureaucratic settings. Distinct literatures focus on policy (e.g., Lindblom and Cohen, 1979; Weiss, Murphy-Greene, and Birkeland, 2005) and practice (e.g., Walter, Nutley, and Davies, 2005). Education, medicine, and public health are much more often the focus of the literature than criminal justice. One major exception to that generalization was precipitated by the Crime Reduction Programme for England and Wales. Intended as an evidence-based program for the improvement of criminal justice policies, it was a debacle. Budgeted at £400 million over 10 years, it was abandoned within 3 years and illustrates almost every way in which a government program can go wrong (insufficient resources, heavy-handed central planning, failures of planning and implementation, and political interference; Maguire, 2004; Nutley and Homel, 2006).

The obstacles to the adoption of policies based on systematic evidence are far easier to describe than to overcome. Joan Petersilia has written several important articles over nearly 25 years on the influence of knowledge on policy that sketch out all the problems (e.g., Blumstein and Petersilia, 1995; Petersilia, 1991, 2008). Threshold problems include making knowledge available to policy makers. Scholarly journals and books typically are not written to be reader-friendly for nonspecialists, and academic career structures and incentives typically do not encourage or reward writing for practitioners or participating in policy processes. Policy processes are hugely complex and time consuming. Academics often lack the stamina to compete for influence with representatives of organizations, professional associations, and advocacy groups that have vested interests in existing ways of doing business or ideological axes to grind.

## Subject

Whether policy makers in particular places and times pay attention to research evidence depends on the subject. On some subjects, they are highly receptive to influence by evidence about the operation and effects of alternative policy options. In the United States, England, and Wales, for example, even in the law and order climate of recent decades, policy makers have been open to evidence about the preventive effects of situational means to crime prevention and about the preventive effects of early- and mid-childhood programs meant to address risk and protective factors. Situational examples include legislation requiring manufacturers of cars to install ignition locks, exact-change policies in transit systems, street lighting, and land-planning programs meant to make spaces more defensible (Clarke, 1995). Developmental measures include the proliferation of Head Start programs in the United States, Sure Start programs in England and Wales, and Communities that Care programs in both countries and elsewhere (Farrington and Welsh, 2007).

On other subjects, American and English policy makers have, in recent decades, been completely unreceptive. The overwhelming weight of the research evidence shows that the three strikes laws are not effective deterrents to crime (Tonry, 2009) and that capital punishment is not an effective deterrent to homicide (Donohue and Wolfers, 2005) or a more effective deterrent than a sentence to life imprisonment (Hood and Hoyle, 2008). Nor, more generally, do laws that mandate minimum prison sentences after convictions for particular offenses produce

measurable deterrent effects (Doob and Webster, 2003; Tonry, 2009). Overwhelming evidence likewise demonstrates that the law-enforcement (supply-side) emphasis of the 30-year American “War on Drugs” reduces none of the things it purportedly is designed to reduce—drug use, drug trafficking, or drug availability (as measured by the street prices of illicit drugs; if they were becoming less available, then prices should rise. Instead, for most of the last 25 years, they have fallen; Caulkins and Reuter, 2010; Tonry, 2004b).

In a rational world, or one in which policies were based primarily on evidence, all of those policies would have been altered long ago. It is not, however, only such high-visibility policies that have proven impermeable to influence by evidence. A large body of evidence accumulated in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s showing that “boot camps” for young offenders, based on the model of basic training for military recruits, had no long-term effects on participants’ reoffending or on their self-discipline or self-esteem (Wilson and MacKenzie, 2007). Decades of evaluations of the effects of Neighborhood Watch programs on crime and of Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) programs on later drug use, in which police officers lecture elementary school students on the dangers of drug use showed that both programs were ineffective. Neighborhood Watch, for many years, could not be shown to affect crime rates (Hope, 1995), while DARE was shown not to diminish drug experimentation or use (Weiss et al., 2005). Both programs continued to proliferate and to attract federal, state, and local funding in the United States, as did Neighborhood Watch in England and Wales. An equivalent English example is provided by the proliferation of the world’s most extensive program of closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras in the face of evidence of a general absence of crime-preventive effects except under very narrowly limited circumstances (Welsh and Farrington, 2009).

Sometimes, governments are so committed to policies that they do not want to have their effectiveness evaluated lest they be shown to be ineffective. One classic example is the unwillingness of Tony Blair’s English Labour Government to evaluate the preventive effects of its trademark Antisocial Behaviour Orders initiative (National Audit Office, 2006).<sup>5</sup> Another vivid example is California Governor Pete Wilson’s statement, in vetoing legislation creating a commission to study the effects of California three strikes law, that the legislation’s aim was to “disprove the obvious positive impact of the Three Strikes law. . . . There are many mysteries in life, but the efficiency of ‘Three Strikes’ . . . is not one of them” (California District Attorneys Association, 2004: 32).

Similar observations presumably can be made about every country. Some initiatives, whatever the strength of evidence as to their effectiveness, are simply not of interest in some places. American presumptive sentencing guidelines have been shown to reduce sentencing disparities, especially affecting members of ethnic minorities, and to make correctional resource needs predictable (Tonry, 1996), but they have been adopted nowhere in continental Europe,

---

5. The National Audit Office (2006: 5) observed of antisocial behavior orders: “The absence of formal evaluation by the Home Office of the success of different interventions . . . prevents local areas targeting interventions in the most efficient way to achieve the best outcome. . . .”

because they are regarded as mechanistic and are believed to diminish the human dimensions of sentencing decisions. During a period in the 1980s when community-service orders were adopted as prison alternatives in some European countries, most prominently Scotland and the Netherlands, based on empirical evidence that judges would use them as alternatives with no higher breach rates than those that characterize short prison sentences, Finnish policy makers rejected them as unduly paternalistic and intrusive. German policy makers rejected them because they were believed to violate a constitutional prohibition against involuntary servitude. Likewise, despite evidence from Germany and Scandinavia that day fines successfully can be used as prison alternatives, Netherlands policy makers rejected them on principle.<sup>6</sup>

### Space

The preceding paragraph describes various evidence-based policy initiatives that found favor in some countries but not in others. I elaborate some of those examples in this section but move away from a narrow focus on evidence-based policy making to the wider subject of policy transfer across national boundaries.

Community penalties provide a good illustration of national differences in policy interest (Tonry, 1999). Community service as a prison alternative first was developed in California as a device for avoiding imprisonment, and removal from their children, of poor women convicted of minor welfare frauds. English policy makers showed interest in the new sanction and established pilot projects in the early 1970s to see how it worked. Evaluations showed that in half of the cases in which judges imposed the new sanctions, the offender otherwise would have gone to prison and that rates of reoffending were no worse than if they had been imprisoned. Based on that positive evidence, community service was authorized throughout the country. Scottish policy makers followed suit in the late 1970s, and after their own evaluations of pilot projects, so did Dutch policy makers. Many other European countries did likewise.

Day fines provide another example. First developed in Scandinavian countries in the 1920s, they were adopted in Germany in the 1970s as sanctions to be used after German policy makers radically chose to diminish use of short prison sentences. The notion of a sanction that can be tailored both to the offender's means and to the severity of his crime should commend itself to policy makers in any country who believe in rational policy making and who doubt the desirability of imprisonment. The American federal government invested in day-fine pilot projects throughout the country in the early 1990s. In none of the sites where the pilots were carried out were local policy makers willing to use day fines in lieu of prison sentences. In no pilot site, and in no other American jurisdiction, were day fines established as authorized sanctions. The English government also showed interest: after successful evaluations of pilot projects, the Criminal Justice Act 1991 authorized the use of day fines throughout the country. In the face

---

6. More details, including citations to major sources, can be found in Tonry (1999).

of hostile media coverage and resistance from practitioners, the legislation was rescinded within 1 year of taking effect.

The larger question of policy transfer shows similar geographical variation. Within the United States, the demonstration of the effectiveness of sentencing guidelines in the bellwether states of Minnesota and Washington led to their adoption in a dozen or more states and to consideration (but not adoption) in the 1980s and 1990s in Australia and Canada. The English Criminal Justice Act of 2003 created a sentencing commission charged to create sentencing guidelines. No continental European country has done so.

Sentencing guidelines are an evidence-based innovation. The same broad pattern of geographical differences can be observed in the presence or absence of the influence of other American policy initiatives. The most famous, or notorious, American policy initiatives of the past 20 years are three-strikes-and-you're-out laws, mandatory minimum sentence laws, and sex-offender registration and notification laws (generally called "Megan's Laws"). None can be described as evidence-based; none have been shown to be an effective deterrent or crime-preventative.<sup>7</sup>

None of those initiatives has caught on outside the English-speaking countries. Although the rhetoric of zero-tolerance policing captured the imaginations of conservative politicians and police officials in many countries, only in a few English police forces (most notably, Manchester) has it been adopted in its repressive New York City form. No other country besides England has enacted three strikes laws. Only England, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa have adopted U.S.-style mandatory minimum sentence laws and then in much milder and more narrowly-focused forms. No other jurisdiction, including England, has adopted Megan's Laws (the English have adopted sex-offender registration laws but without allowing—as in the United States—public access to the information).

Even in the Anglo-Saxon countries that have followed U.S. leads, the punch usually has been pulled.<sup>8</sup> The English Crime (Sentences) Act of 1997 did enact a three strikes law (and one two strikes law), but unlike in the United States, judges were given authority to impose another sentence when they believed justice so required. Mandatory minimum sentence laws in Canada, Australia, and South Africa called for sentences far short of the 10- and 20-year minimums common in the United States (Tonry, 2009) and pulled the "mandatory" punch by authorizing escape hatches for cases in which judges believed the mandated sentence was too severe.

---

7. Tonry (2008) summarized the evidence on the deterrent effectiveness of capital punishment, and Tonry (2009) discussed the three strikes and mandatory minimum sentence laws.

8. Jones and Newburn (2007) provided the fullest case study of policy transfers from one country to another; they examined English receptivity to American initiatives concerning private prisons, zero-tolerance policing, and mandatory minimum sentence laws.

## Time

When a new initiative is considered, whether or not evidence-based, often determines whether it will be enacted. In the key phrase from the research utilization literature, it is critical whether “windows of opportunity” are open. In Finland, for example, to refer again to developments mentioned earlier, the window was not open to evidence concerning the effects of community service when its adoption first was considered. Later, motivated to continue a decades-long strategy of reduction of the prison population, the window opened. The evidence had not changed; policy makers’ willingness to act on it had (Lappi-Seppälä, 2007).

Recent American history provides vivid evidence of the importance of windows of opportunity. Although the lethal effects of private gun ownership in the United States on rates of suicide, homicide, and accidental firearm deaths are well known, political considerations have precluded enactment of meaningful federal gun control laws. The two exceptions are in the late 1960s, immediately after the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, when the most ambitious federal antigun laws ever were enacted, and in the early 1980s after the attempted assassination of President Ronald Reagan, when the Brady Laws on gun sales were enacted. Those windows remained open only for a short time, however. Major provisions of the 1968 law were fundamentally weakened. More recently, federal legislation forbidding the sale of some semiautomatic weapons to individuals was repealed.

Two other examples, however, are more heartening. Research on correctional boot camps showing no effects on subsequent offending had no discernible influence on policy for 20 years (Wilson and MacKenzie, 2007). However, the political climate began to change in the early 21st century. Abusive incidents in several states in which young people died at the hands of authoritarian guards (often during strenuous exercise) led to a sudden loss of enthusiasm for boot camps. The research evidence suddenly became influential in many states as policy makers and correctional administrators considered closing or transforming boot camps. Few of the no-frills camps that were popular in the 1980s and 1990s survived.

The story with DARE is similar. For 20 years, support was impervious to the influence of consistently negative evaluation findings. Federal policy makers during the Bush II administration began to focus on evidence-based educational policies, and drug-abuse education was not exempt. DARE within a couple of years ceased being politically untouchable. The absence of evidence of effectiveness precluded federal support. Programs closed across the country (Weiss et al., 2005).

## Conclusion

Research-derived evidence influences policy and practice in some places, at some times, and on some subjects. On some subjects, especially those that implicate important normative and ideological concerns, such as capital punishment or severity of sentences, evidence is seldom likely to make much difference. On other subjects, especially those that can be characterized as primarily technological or technocratic (e.g., the crime-preventive effects of ignition locks), evidence is often likely to be influential. For subjects falling in the great middle, evidence might

or might not matter depending on the political and policy weight of considerations that point in other directions. The presence or absence of windows of opportunity in specific times and places makes all the difference.

Evidence is, however, intellectually and socially important on all these issues. Even concerning the relatively impervious issues like capital punishment and sentencing severity, evidence sharpens the debates and clarifies what the issues really are. It is important to show and know, for example, that no credible empirical evidence suggests that capital punishment is an effective deterrent of homicide. If the evidence is absent or unclear, then people who support the death penalty for ideological reasons, but feel uncomfortable saying so, can hide behind claims that they support capital punishment as a means to saving innocent victims' lives. If the evidence clearly shows that death does not deter, then the debate must be made in the moral terms that really motivate opponents and supporters. Likewise, if the evidence shows that California's three strikes law has no discernible effects on crime patterns or trends, its defenders must be prepared to defend the savage sentences it requires in moral terms. That is a good thing.

The accumulation of evidence is also important concerning midlevel issues as to which windows might open. American critics of boot camps, DARE, and Neighborhood Watch have been frustrated for decades by policy makers' failure to take account of evidence. However, when policy makers' minds finally opened concerning boot camps and DARE, the evidence had a devastating effect. The same thing probably will happen eventually concerning Neighborhood Watch and, in England, CCTV.

Uggen and Inderbitzin (2010) are correct in their diagnosis of a problem—the marginalization from the worlds of criminal justice policy and practice of some segments of American criminology. Scholars in earlier times were much more actively engaged in policy processes, and appear to have been more influential. The reasons for that marginalization are not uncomplicated—university insularity, academic incentive and reward systems, career structures, and emphasis on cutting-edge technologies and techniques—and are hard for affected individuals to resist. That is a pity. Policy makers yearn for evidence, although not at all times or on all subjects, and are susceptible to influence by it. And many academics have fun, occasionally, being invited into the corridors of power. Some even have influence on the decisions that are made there.

## References

- Blumstein, Alfred and Joan Petersilia. 1995. Investing in criminal justice research. In (James Q. Wilson and Joan Petersilia, eds.), *Crime*. San Francisco, CA: ICS Press.
- Burawoy, Michael. 2004. Public sociologies: Contradictions, dilemmas, and possibilities. *Social Forces*, 82: 1603–1618.
- Burawoy, Michael. 2005. For public sociology: 2004 Presidential Address. *American Sociological Review*, 70: 4–28.
- Butler, Richard Austen. 1974. The foundation of the Institute of Criminology in Cambridge. In (Roger Hood, ed.), *Crime, Criminology, and Public Policy*. London, U.K.: Heinemann.

- California District Attorneys Association. 2004. *Prosecutors' Perspectives on California's Three Strikes Law: A 10-Year Retrospective*. Sacramento: California District Attorneys Association.
- Caulkins, Jonathan P. and Peter Reuter. 2010. How drug enforcement affects drug prices. In (Michael H. Tonry, ed.), *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, Vol. 39. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Clarke, Ronald V. 1995. Situational crime prevention. In (Michael H. Tonry and David P. Farrington, eds.), *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, Vol. 19. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Donohue, John J. and Justin Wolfers. 2005. Uses and abuses of empirical evidence in the death penalty debate. *Stanford Law Review*, 58: 791–846.
- Doob, Anthony and Cheryl Webster. 2003. Sentence severity and crime: Accepting the null hypothesis. In (Michael H. Tonry, ed.), *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, Vol. 30. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Farrington, David P. and Brandon C. Welsh. 2007. *Saving Children from a Life of Crime: Early Risk Factors and Effective Interventions*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ferri, Enrico. 1921. *Relazione sul Progetto Preliminare di Codice Penale Italiano*. Milan: Treves.
- Finnane, Mark. 1998. Sir John Barrie and the Melbourne Institute of Criminology. *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 31: 69–82.
- Glueck, Sheldon. 1952 [1927–1928]. Principles of a rational penal code. In *Crime and Correction: Selected Papers*. Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Harcourt, Bernard E. 2006. *Against Prediction: Profiling, Policing, and Punishing in an Actuarial Age*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Hood, Roger (ed.). 1974. *Crime, Criminology, and Public Policy*. London, U.K.: Heinemann.
- Hood, Roger. 2002. Criminology and public policy: The vital role of empirical research. In (Anthony Bottoms and Michael H. Tonry, eds.), *Ideology, Crime, and Criminal Justice*. Devon, U.K.: Willan.
- Hood, Roger and Carolyn Hoyle. 2008. *The Death Penalty: A World-Wide Perspective*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press.
- Hope, Tim. 1995. Community crime prevention. In (Michael H. Tonry and David P. Farrington, eds.), *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, Vol. 19. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Jones, Trevor and Tim Newburn. 2007. *Policy Transfer and Criminal Justice: Exploring U.S. Influence over British Crime Control Policy*. Berkshire, U.K.: Open University Press.
- Lappi-Seppälä, Tapio. 2007. Penal policy in Scandinavia. In (Michael H. Tonry, ed.), *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, Vol. 36. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Lindblom, Charles E. and David Cohen. 1979. *Usable Knowledge*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Maguire, Mike. 2004. The crime reduction programme in England and Wales: Reflections on the vision and the reality. *Criminal Justice*, 4: 213–237.

- Morris, Albert. 1975. A history of the American Society of Criminology: 1941–1974. *Criminology*, 13: 123–167.
- National Audit Office. 2006. *The Home Office: Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour*. Report by the Comptroller and the Auditor General. London, U.K.: The Stationery Office.
- Nutley, Sandra and Peter Homel. 2006. Delivering evidence-based policy and practice: Lessons from the implementation of the U.K. crime reduction programme. *Evidence & Policy*, 2: 5–26.
- Petersilia, Joan. 1991. Policy relevance and the future of criminology. *Criminology*, 29: 1–15.
- Petersilia, Joan. 2008. Influencing public policy: An embedded criminologist reflects on California prison reform. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 4: 335–356.
- President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice. 1967. *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Radzinowicz, Leon. 1999. *Adventures in Criminology*. London, U.K.: Routledge.
- Stolz, Barbara. 2001. *Criminal Justice Policy Making: Federal Roles and Processes*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Schlossman, Steven. 1985 *Delinquency Prevention in South Chicago: A Fifty-Year Assessment of the Chicago Area Project*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND.
- Schlossman, Steven and Michael Sedlak. 1983. The Chicago Area Project revisited. *Crime & Delinquency*, 29: 398–462.
- Tonry, Michael. 1996. *Sentencing Matters*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tonry, Michael. 1999. Parochialism in American sentencing policy. *Crime & Delinquency*, 45: 48–65.
- Tonry, Michael. 2004a. Criminology and criminal justice research in Europe. In (Gerben Bruinsma, Henk Elffers, and Jan de Keijser, eds.), *Punishment, Places and Perpetrators: Developments in Criminology and Criminal Justice*. Devon, U.K.: Willan.
- Tonry, Michael. 2004b. *Thinking about Crime: Sense and Sensibility in American Penal Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tonry, Michael. 2008. Learning from the limitations of deterrence research. In (Michael Tonry, ed.), *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, Vol. 37. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Tonry, Michael. 2009. The mostly unintended effects of mandatory penalties: Two centuries of consistent findings. In (Michael Tonry, ed.), *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, Vol. 38. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Tonry, Michael and David Green. 2003. Criminology and public policy in the USA and UK. In (Lucian Zedner and Andrew Ashworth, eds.), *The Criminological Foundations of Penal Policy: Essays in Honour of Roger Hood*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press.
- Uggen, Christopher and Michelle Inderbitzin. 2010. Public criminologies. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Walter, Isabel, Sandra Nutley, and Huw Davies. 2005. What works to promote evidence-based practice? A cross-sector review. *Evidence & Policy*, 1: 335–363.



- 
- Weiss, Carol H. 1986. Research and policy-making: A limited partnership. In (Frank Heller, ed.), *The Use and Abuse of Social Science*. London, U.K.: Sage.
- Weiss, Carol H., Erin Murphy-Green, and Sarah Birkeland. 2005. An alternate route to policy influence: How evaluations affect D.A.R.E. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 26: 12–30.
- Welsh, Brandon C. and David P. Farrington. 2009. *Making Public Places Safer: Surveillance and Crime Prevention*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wilson, David B. and Doris L. MacKenzie. 2007. Boot camps. In (Brandon C. Welsh and David P. Farrington, eds.), *Preventing Crime: What Works for Children, Offenders, Victims, and Places*. New York: Springer.
- Zedner, Lucia and Andrew Ashworth (eds.). 2003. *The Criminological Foundations of Penal Policy: Essays in Honour of Roger Hood*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press.
- 

**Michael Tonry** is a professor of law and public policy at the University of Minnesota and senior fellow at the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement.



## The role of research and researchers in crime and justice policy

**Daniel P. Mears**

*Florida State University*

If criminology is to have an impact on public policy, then presumably it should take steps to encourage research that is relevant to policy. Such a claim presumes, however, that criminology *should* have a role in public policy discussions and debates. Whether it should or should not is ultimately a moral question, and it is one that I will side step conveniently here by suggesting that most research has the potential to contribute to public policy and might do so through a myriad of ways, regardless of the intentions of those who produce the research. Imagine, for example, that we line up 100 criminologists who aim to change the world through their research. Then we line up another 100 who would prefer to focus on “basic science” scholarship that aims to unpack the causes and effects of various phenomena (e.g., variation in property crime rates) or to measure certain constructs (e.g., self-control) better (Merton, 1973; Rossi, 1980). I submit that it would be unclear which group would exert the greatest influence on policy.

Such a claim ultimately would have to be evaluated empirically to test its veracity. As far as I know, no studies exist that document in a rigorous, generalizable manner how research influences public views and the programs, practices, policies, laws, and court decisions at local, state, and national levels. Consequently, it seems to be an open question whether one approach would improve policy more than another and respond better to public needs and desires.

So, should those who want to promote policy-focused criminology, or its reflexive variant—“public criminology” (Uggen and Inderbitzin, 2010, this issue)—give up? I do not think so. Rather, I think the implications of the claim are mundane. What, for example, should policy-focused criminologists do? Continue as they have and hope for the best. What about criminologists who are more interested in “basic” research? Continue as they have and, again, hope for the best.

---

Direct correspondence to Daniel P. Mears, College of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Florida State University, 634 West Call Street, Tallahassee, FL 32306 (e-mail: dmears@fsu.edu).

### A Balanced Portfolio of Research

Yes, but what about specific types of “public criminology” research and activities that should be pursued to ensure that the goals of public criminology are achieved? I will answer the question differently at the end of this essay. Here I would argue that what criminology should do is to pursue what in economics would be described as a balanced portfolio of investments. This approach involves diversifying one’s investments into different sectors of the economy. Doing so allows one to reduce the risk—in particular, a dramatic decrease in the value of one’s investment—associated with pursuing any one stock, fund, or part of the economy and to increase the chances of a sizable return. Such a strategy seems particularly indicated in a context in which investment returns are uncertain and in which substantial profits or losses can be made in almost any sector of the economy, depending on the country, year, stock, bond, fund, and so on.

The potential benefits of a balanced-portfolio approach to criminological research are similar. By investing in all types of research, including the four described by Uggen and Inderbitzin (2010)—professional criminology, critical criminology, policy criminology, and public criminology—the field of criminology maximizes the likelihood of returns not only for public criminology but also for the others. The reason? One never knows how one type of research might inform another. Certainly, one could pursue the research equivalent of individual stock selection (e.g., investing considerable resources in a large-scale, multisite experimental evaluation of some policing program) and potentially obtain larger returns. The risk, however, is that the expenditure gains one nothing, whereas an alternative investment, spread out over different types of research, might produce at least some return.

That said, the argument for a balanced portfolio of research begs the important question, “What *should* the distribution of investments be?” For example, among all criminologists, how many should focus on a given type of research? Or, given a set amount of research dollars, how much should be allocated to each type of research? Answers to these questions would depend greatly on the current status quo. If criminologists paid virtually no attention to policy-focused research, then clearly it would be necessary to prioritize funding for such research, at least for a few years. If, however, criminologists collectively paid equal amounts of attention to each type, then perhaps we would want to allocate new labor or resources equally across each type.

Perhaps not. Such investment allocations ultimately involve value decisions, not scientific ones. For that reason, it is relevant that, to my knowledge, no consensus has been reached about the proper amount of attention that should be given to each type of research or, to make matters worse, the empirical evidence about the distribution of current research efforts. Given that state of affairs, it is difficult to know whether we in fact need more of any type of research, whether it be professional criminology (e.g., basic research), public criminology, or any other. A needs evaluation thus might be helpful before dramatically changing criminologists’ research priorities.

### **Empirical Evidence of a Need for Public Criminology?**

In evaluation research, a “needs evaluation” stands at the foundation of the evaluation hierarchy (Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, 2004). The basic idea is that before devising a policy, you should measure the amount and nature of the problem before assuming that anything needs to be fixed. Assuming that a problem does exist, it is important to describe not only its nature but also what caused it. Measuring need in this way is challenging but essential. For example, armed with this type of specific information, we would have a better chance of devising a policy that would be targeted sufficiently as to have a chance at being effective.

The relevant question here is whether a need exists for public criminology. Let us assume that, yes, as a general matter, a need exists. That understanding takes us only a short distance. The larger challenge is measuring the *amount* of need and its *nature*. For example, perhaps we have a large shortfall of research that focuses on practitioners, and perhaps the shortfall is especially acute in the area of prison officer victimization. Armed with such knowledge, we can direct our attention in a way that addresses the shortfall and, at the same time, addresses the goal of increasing public criminology efforts.

Unfortunately, as far as I know, little systematic empirical evidence indicates one way or the other about the amount or the nature of need for particular types of public criminology research. Of course, any assessment of need would require defining and operationalizing “public criminology.” Because many research activities might not appear to be “public criminology” at first blush, an assessment would be challenging. Indeed, if we hired an army of researchers, then what would we tell them to tally? That is, which research would count as public criminology and which would not? At present, I do not think that a clear answer exists.

### **Empirical Evidence of Public Criminology Impact?**

The premise of any policy is that it should have an impact. That means it produces a positive outcome of some type—an improvement for society. What are the measures that we would use to examine whether public criminology produces improvements?

Some outcomes are intrinsically difficult to measure. What exactly, for example, would be an improvement in public dialogue or in responsiveness to or help for victims and practitioners? No set of researchers is likely to agree on the answer.

Even so, studies might focus on specific dimensions in which perhaps some common ground could be found. For example, efforts to communicate research findings to the public could be assessed using questionnaires. We might monitor on an annual basis the public’s knowledge about various crime and justice topics and determine whether various strategies increased the accuracy of public perceptions about such topics (in those cases in which objective facts exist). Other outcome dimensions likely would be considerably harder to measure. Public criminology aims, for example, to reframe cultural images of justice, as per Uggen and Inderbitzin (2010). Some heavy lifting would be required to provide sufficiently nuanced and valid measures of such

images. And, of course, the reframing is not the ultimate goal. Rather, the larger goal presumably is one of helping to make society a better place. Measuring that goal is no small task.

The perfect is the enemy of the good, according to Voltaire. Perfect measurement of public criminology's goals is simply not feasible. But that does not mean that measurement would not help matters. To the contrary, it might help clarify precisely what public criminology is and what outcomes are relevant to assessing its contributions. Absent such measures, proponents must take recourse in what they hope are its benefits, and critics simply can assert that public criminology achieves nothing. This situation is less than ideal.

### **How to Increase Public Criminology?**

If we accept that a policy-focused public criminology is greatly needed, then the following question results: How do we increase such research? For some, the answer is clear—support more policy-focused research (“policy criminology”) and policy-reframing research (“public criminology”). But that solution assumes a questionable causal nexus. In particular, it assumes that efforts, say, to evaluate a community-policy program will offer more to public dialogue (one of public criminology's goals) than, say, the effort to develop a special measure of self-control.

Such a contention rests, I believe, on shaky grounds. Scholarship on the sociology of science (see, e.g., Merton, 1973, 1982) and criminal justice policy making (see, e.g., Stolz, 2002) highlights that the causal links are diverse. A better measurement instrument might achieve even greater advances in policy and public understanding than an overtly “public criminology” undertaking, such as partnering with a neighborhood group. Perhaps, for example, a researcher with a “basic science” bent aims to develop a more refined measure of inequality. The research then unexpectedly sparks a line of policy-focused studies that builds on that measure and leads to new policies (Mears and Stafford, 2002; Rossi, 1980; Rossi et al., 2004). Perhaps this new line of research involves studies that tap into public views toward the topic, views that then might inform the new policies. In this scenario, we have something akin to a public criminology outcome emerging from a basic science endeavor.

Because we have little basis for knowing what kinds of research ultimately will contribute to or become public criminology, pursuing a portfolio of diverse types of research would seem the better part of wisdom. One simply never knows what will happen with a given study or what forces will shape policy.

I recall talking with a member of a state legislative criminal justice committee and asking whether the state's investment in supermax prisons would be swayed one way or the other by a large body of studies showing that such prisons are not cost effective. The conversation to that point included a discussion of possible benefits and costs of supermaxes. I then asked the following question: What if supermaxes were found to be effective but not more so than cheaper alternatives? The legislator said that it would not matter. The mood among the state lawmakers was that supermaxes were a good idea, and they wanted one regardless of cost.

If the legislator's assessment was correct, then it suggests that a mountain of well-conducted, policy-focused research would not have shifted the legislature's decision. It knew what it wanted.

That said, perhaps one research study or another might have influenced the decision. Perhaps a public criminology enterprise that aimed to educate citizens and legislators about prison-order problems and solutions might have shifted the discussion and led to the consideration of alternatives. Perhaps a cost–benefit evaluation might have achieved the same result. Perhaps a “basic science” study widely covered in the media might have weaved its way into the legislature’s deliberations or into those of the criminal justice committee. Perhaps not. The point is that it frequently might be the case that public criminology is achieved best through efforts that, on the face of it, do not look obviously like “public criminology.”

At the same time, it merits emphasizing that overtly “public criminology” efforts might backfire and so undermine the goals associated with these efforts. For example, because public criminology more directly addresses the political dimension of crime and justice, its efforts entail a greater involvement in political discourse. I am no political scientist. But I do know that political winds can shift quickly. That means that a mishandled public criminology effort might create a political backlash. This possibility does not mean that public criminology should not be undertaken. It simply means that this type of work is not without risks and that in some circumstances alternative types of research might achieve public criminology’s goals better.

So, absent clear guidance from empirical research about what actually influences policy and about what really counts as public criminology, what is a criminologist who wants to make society a better place to do? The answer seems simple, if mundane—keep the faith. Pursue research that you believe will make a difference. For some, that might mean policy criminology or public criminology. But for others, it might be basic research or “critical criminology” efforts. They all constitute important investments that might pay as yet unknown dividends.

### **Taking a Stand?**

All that said, should criminologists take a stand on issues? Here, I think the policy prescription is self-evident, if self-serving—more funding should be provided and a better infrastructure should be implemented for crime and justice research. Many social scientists, such as Alfred Blumstein and Joan Petersilia (1995), have lamented the woeful state of funding for such research relative to other social policy areas. In the end, I think it is reasonable to say that criminology as a discipline produces a remarkable amount of policy-relevant research given the relative paucity of funding for basic or applied research. More and better research would position the discipline better as well as its professional organizations to take policy stands. Even then, the fact that many criminologists differ about the state of research in different areas suggests to me that it might be more productive in the long run for these organizations to focus more on ensuring that more and better research occurs and that it sees the light of day through a variety of dissemination strategies. Taking a stand on some issues, however warranted, raises the real risk of undermining the perceived credibility of criminological research in general (see, e.g., Basu, Dirsmith, and Gupta, 1999), which in turn might undermine the effort to achieve a particular policy outcome.

## Conclusion

I am highly partial to the argument that criminology should aim to improve society and to inform policy discussions and debates. I also am partial to the view that too little policy-focused research occurs. Not least, I am partial to the public criminology argument that greater attention should be given to helping to reframe some debates, if only through illuminating unknown facts or helping to make a wider swath of views heard.

However, I do not believe that one has to adhere to these views to engage in meaningful or important research. Science is in no small part justified by curiosity—how does the world work? From that perspective, it is not necessary to take recourse in the notion that greater understanding will improve the world. Yet, greater understanding sometimes *can* lead to big changes. And because we cannot know which types of understanding will yield such changes, it seems important to support a wide range—a balanced portfolio—of research.

In the end, I do believe that more policy-focused research is warranted, both to increase the evidence base for the crime and justice societies we have and to contribute to more “basic science” research. Many scholars have identified ways to increase the amount and quality of policy-focused criminological work. Among the steps that could be taken, which I discuss elsewhere (Mears, 2010), are the following: Educate and train students in evaluation research; promote and reward applied research among those who work in universities and colleges; integrate applied and basic research where possible; create better ties among researchers, policy makers, and practitioners; institutionalize evaluation research into criminal justice system operations and activities; create independent criminal justice research agencies; and develop accessible sources of information about basic facts concerning crime, criminal justice operations, and a range of programs and policies. The list is not exhaustive, but it underscores the idea that pragmatic strategies exist for promoting research that better informs public policy and perhaps that in turn helps shift discussion and debates in productive ways.

## References

- Basu, Onker, Mark Dirsmith, and Parveen Gupta. 1999. The coupling of the symbolic and the technical in an institutionalized context: The negotiated order of the GAO's audit reporting process. *American Sociological Review*, 64: 506–526.
- Blumstein, Alfred and Joan Petersilia. 1995. Investing in criminal justice research. In (James Q. Wilson and Joan Petersilia, eds.), *Crime*. San Francisco, CA: Institute for Contemporary Studies Press.
- Mears, Daniel P. 2010. *American Criminal Justice Policy: An Evaluation Approach to Increasing Accountability and Effectiveness*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Mears, Daniel P. and Mark C. Stafford. 2002. Central analytical issues in the generation of cumulative sociological knowledge. *Sociological Focus*, 35: 5–24.
- Merton, Robert K. 1973. *The Sociology of Science: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.



- 
- Merton, Robert K. 1982. *Social Research and the Practicing Professions*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Rossi, Peter H. 1980. The Presidential Address: The challenge and opportunities of applied social research. *American Sociological Review*, 45: 889–904.
- Rossi, Peter H., Mark Lipsey, and Howard E. Freeman. 2004. *Evaluation: A Systematic Approach*, 7th Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stolz, Barbara A. 2002. *Criminal Justice Policy Making: Federal Roles and Processes*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Uggen, Christopher and Michelle Inderbitzin. 2010. Public criminologies. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- 

**Daniel P. Mears**, PhD, is a professor at Florida State University's College of Criminology and Criminal Justice. He conducts basic and applied research on a range of crime and justice topics, including studies of supermax prisons, sentencing, juvenile justice, domestic violence, public opinion, homicide, and prisoner reentry. In a recent book, *American Criminal Justice Policy* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), he argues that research should play a more prominent role in crime and justice policy.



# EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

---

## REDUCING HOMELESS-RELATED CRIME

### The Police, Disorder, and the Homeless

**Anthony A. Braga**, *Senior Editor*

*Rutgers University*

*Harvard University*

The general idea of dealing with disorderly conditions to prevent crime, as developed in the “broken windows theory” (Wilson and Kelling, 1982), is present in a myriad of police strategies ranging from “order maintenance” and “zero-tolerance” policing strategies, where the police attempt to impose order through strict enforcement, to “community” and “problem-oriented policing” strategies in which police attempt to produce order and reduce crime through cooperation with community members and by addressing specific recurring problems (Cordner, 1998; Eck and Maguire, 2000; Kelling and Coles, 1996; Skogan, 2006). Although its application can vary within and across police departments, policing disorder to prevent crime is now a common crime control strategy. Dealing with social and physical disorder associated with homeless populations is a central concern of these policing strategies.

Berk and MacDonald (2010, this issue) present the findings of their evaluation of the Safer Cities Initiative (SCI), which is an intervention implemented by the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) intended to reduce serious crimes by addressing disorderly conditions associated with homeless encampments in the Skid Row section of downtown Los Angeles. Their evaluation suggests that the SCI generated some modest reductions in violent, property, and nuisance street crimes with no evidence of significant spatial crime displacement. Although the available research evidence does not demonstrate consistent theoretical connections between disorderly conditions and more serious crime (Harcourt, 1998; Sampson and Raudenbush, 1999; Skogan, 1990; Taylor, 2001), a growing body of evidence suggests policing disorder strategies may generate crime control benefits nonetheless. It is important to recognize that the available evaluation evidence is not unanimous in supporting this perspective. For instance, a quasi-experimental evaluation of a quality-of-life policing initiative focused on social and physical disorder in four target zones in Chandler, Arizona, did not find any significant reductions in serious crime associated with the strategy (Katz, Webb, and Schaefer, 2001). However, as discussed by Piquero

---

Direct correspondence to Anthony A. Braga, Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 79 John F. Kennedy Street, Cambridge, MA 02138 (e-mail: Anthony\_Braga@harvard.edu).

(2010, this issue), the study by Berk and MacDonald (2010) joins some mounting evidence that suggests dealing with disorderly conditions may indeed control crime.

Five sophisticated statistical analyses of the effects of policing disorder on violent crime trends in New York City in the 1990s have been conducted. With the exception of the study by Harcourt and Ludwig (2006), four of these analyses found statistically significant associations between the New York Police Department (NYPD) strategy and decreased violent crime, with the effects ranging from small (Messner et al., 2007; Rosenfeld, Fornango, and Rengifo, 2007) to large (Corman and Mocan, 2002; Kelling and Sousa, 2001). Other macro-level analyses of the relationship between misdemeanor arrests and more serious crimes have generated results supportive of policing disorder strategies (Sampson and Cohen, 1988; Worrall, 2002). Two randomized controlled trials in Jersey City, NJ (Braga et al., 1999), and Lowell, MA (Braga and Bond, 2008), found that problem-oriented policing strategies that focused on social and physical disorder resulted in significant reductions in citizen calls for service and crime incidents in violent crime hot spots with little evidence of immediate spatial displacements. Finally, in the Netherlands, Keitzer, Lindenberg, and Steg (2008) conducted six field experiments examining the links between disorder and more serious crime and concluded that dealing with disorderly conditions was an important intervention to halt the spread of further crime and disorder.

The available research evidence also points to the importance of addressing “how” policing disorder programs are implemented. Questions have been raised about the legitimacy of specific tactics used by the police to control disorder. Inappropriate policing disorder strategies, such as the indiscriminate aggressive tactics used in zero-tolerance approaches, can have negative impacts on police–community relationships. For instance, the heightened use of arrests for minor crimes, such as public drinking and smoking marijuana in plain view, in the NYPD’s order maintenance policing strategies have been criticized as exacerbating already poor relationships between the police and minority communities and increasing citizen complaints about police misconduct and abuse of force (Golub, Johnson, and Dunlap, 2007; Greene, 1999; Harcourt and Ludwig, 2007). Michael White (2010, this issue) questions whether the enforcement actions taken by the LAPD in the SCI represent “good policing” practices suggested by community and problem-oriented policing advocates. John Eck (2010, this issue) raises concerns about the potential for misinterpretation, misapplication, and misuse of the policing strategy described by Berk and MacDonald (2010) and suggests additional clarity on the units of homelessness (specific places vs. large areas) and specifying the nature of the treatment of homeless encampments and other forms of enforcement used outside of the encampments.

Berk and MacDonald (2010) observe rightly that the SCI was not designed to be a long-term strategy to address homelessness in Los Angeles or to respond to the social and personal problems presented by homelessness. However, the policy essays by Culhane (2010, this issue), Piquero (2010), Rowe and O’Connell (2010, this issue), and Vitale (2010, this issue) make suggestions on how to craft more ambitious (and legitimate) police strategies to address crime and disorder problems associated with homeless populations and on how to reduce homeless

populations. These suggestions include ensuring that police officers are connecting indigent homeless people to available services, working with community groups and nonprofit agencies to establish permanent housing with appropriate support services (even for people with mental health and drug abuse problems), engaging in community asset mapping and community development efforts, and developing interdisciplinary homeless outreach teams.

Dealing with disorderly conditions to prevent more serious crimes has become, and is likely to remain, a central crime control strategy used by modern police agencies. The available research evidence and normative discussions on good policing practices suggests that many police departments need to be more refined in their approach to crime and disorder issues. Policing disorder programs infused with community and problem-oriented policing principles, such as focusing on specific hot spot locations, adopting alternative strategies to modify the conditions that give rise to crime and disorder problems at these places, and forming strategic partnerships with community-based and social service organizations, seem best positioned to generate both crime control gains and better police–community relations.

## References

- Berk, Richard and John MacDonald. 2010. Policing the homeless: An evaluation of efforts to reduce homeless-related crime. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Braga, Anthony A. and Brenda J. Bond. 2008. Policing crime and disorder hot spots: A randomized controlled trial. *Criminology*, 46: 577–608.
- Braga, Anthony A., David L. Weisburd, Elin J. Waring, Lorraine Green Mazerolle, William Spelman, and Francis Gajewski. 1999. Problem-oriented policing in violent crime places: A randomized controlled experiment. *Criminology*, 37: 541–580.
- Cordner, Gary. 1998. Problem-oriented policing vs. zero tolerance. In (Tara O'Connor Shelley and Anne Grant, eds.), *Problem-Oriented Policing: Crime-Specific Problems, Critical Issues, and Making POP Work*. Washington, DC: Police Executive Research Forum.
- Corman, Hope and Naci Mocan. 2005. Carrots, sticks, and broken windows. *Journal of Law & Economics*, 48: 235–262.
- Culhane, Dennis P. 2010. Tackling homelessness in Los Angeles' Skid Row: The role of policing strategies and the spatial deconcentration of homelessness. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Eck, John E. 2010. Policy is in the details: Using external validity to help policy makers. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Eck, John E. and Edward Maguire. 2000. Have changes in policing reduced violent crime? An assessment of the evidence. In (Alfred Blumstein and Joel Wallman, eds.), *The Crime Drop in America*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Golub, Andrew, Brian D. Johnson, and Eloise Dunlap. 2007. The race/ethnicity disparity in misdemeanor marijuana arrests in New York City. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 6: 131–164.

- Greene, Judith A. 1999. Zero tolerance: A case study of police practices and policies in New York City. *Crime & Delinquency*, 45: 171–181.
- Harcourt, Bernard. 1998. Reflecting on the subject: A critique of the social influence conception of deterrence, the broken windows theory, and order-maintenance policing New York Style. *Michigan Law Review*, 97: 291–389.
- Harcourt, Bernard and Jens Ludwig. 2006. Broken windows: New evidence from New York City and a five-city experiment. *University of Chicago Law Review*, 73: 271–320.
- Harcourt, Bernard and Jens Ludwig. 2007. Reefer madness: Broken windows policing and misdemeanor marijuana arrests in New York City, 1989–2000. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 6: 165–182.
- Katz, Charles, Vincent Webb, and David Schaefer. 2001. An assessment of the impact of quality-of-life policing on crime and disorder. *Justice Quarterly*, 18: 825–876.
- Keitzer, Kees, Siegwart Lindenberg, and Linda Steg. 2008. The spreading of disorder. *Science*, 322: 1681–1685.
- Kelling, George L. and Catherine Coles. 1996. *Fixing Broken Windows: Restoring Order and Reducing Crime in Our Communities*. New York: Free Press.
- Kelling, George L. and William Sousa. 2001. *Do Police Matter? An Analysis of the Impact of New York City's Police Reforms*. Civic report no. 22. New York: Manhattan Institute.
- Messner, Steven F., Sandro Galea, Kenneth Tardiff, Melissa Tracy, Angela Bucciarelli, Tinka Markhan Piper, Victoria Frye, and David Vlahov. 2007. Policing, drugs, and the homicide decline in New York City in the 1990s. *Criminology*, 45: 385–414.
- Piquero, Alex R. 2010. Policing the homeless.... *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Rosenfeld, Richard, Robert Fornango, and Andres Rengifo. 2007. The impact of order-maintenance policing on New York City homicide and robbery rates: 1988–2001. *Criminology*, 45: 355–384.
- Rowe, Michael and Maria O'Connell. 2010. Policing the homeless: An evaluation of efforts to reduce homeless-related crime. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Sampson, Robert J. and Jacqueline Cohen. 1988. Deterrent effects of the police on crime: A replication and theoretical extension. *Law & Society Review*, 22: 163–189.
- Sampson, Robert J. and Stephen W. Raudenbush. 1999. Systematic social observation of public spaces: A new look at disorder in urban neighborhoods. *American Journal of Sociology*, 105: 603–651.
- Skogan, Wesley G. 1990. *Disorder and Decline: Crime and the Spiral of Decay in American Neighborhoods*. New York: Free Press.
- Skogan, Wesley G. 2006. *Police and Community in Chicago*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Taylor, Ralph B. 2001. *Breaking Away From Broken Windows*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Vitale, Alex S. 2010. The Safer Cities Initiative and the removal of the homeless: Reducing crime or promoting gentrification on LA's Skid Row. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.

- 
- White, Michael D. 2010. Jim Longstreet, Mike Marshall, and the lost art of policing Skid Row. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Wilson, James Q. and George L. Kelling. 1982. Broken windows: The police and neighborhood safety. *Atlantic Monthly*, March: 29–38.
- Worrall, John L. 2002. *Does “Broken Windows” Law Enforcement Reduce Serious Crime?* CICG Research Brief. Sacramento: California Institute for County Government.
- 

**Anthony A. Braga** is a professor in the School of Criminal Justice at Rutgers University and a senior research fellow in the Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government. He is also a fellow of the Academy of Experimental Criminology and a senior fellow in the Berkeley Center for Criminal Justice at the University of California, Berkeley. His research focuses on working with criminal justice agencies to develop crime prevention strategies to deal with urban problems such as gang violence, illegal gun markets, and violent crime hot spots. He received his M.P.A. from Harvard University and his Ph.D. in Criminal Justice from Rutgers University.





# Policing the homeless

## An evaluation of efforts to reduce homeless-related crime

**Richard Berk**

**John MacDonald**

*University of Pennsylvania*

### Research Summary

*Police officials across the United States are increasingly relying on place-based approaches for crime prevention. In this article, we examine the Safer Cities Initiative, a widely publicized place-based policing intervention implemented in Los Angeles's "Skid Row" that focused on crime and disorder associated with homeless encampments. Crime reduction was the goal. The police division in which the program was undertaken provides 8 years of time-series data serving as the observations for the treatment condition. Four adjacent police divisions in which the program was not undertaken provide 8 years of time-series data serving as the observations for the comparison condition. The data are analyzed using a generalized additive model. On balance, we find that this place-based intervention is associated with meaningful reductions in violent, property, and nuisance street crimes. There is no evidence of crime displacement.*

### Policy Implications

*This study provides further evidence that geographically targeted police interventions can lead to significant crime prevention benefits, with no evidence that crime is simply displaced to other areas. Criminologists and the media have given the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) little credit for major reductions in crime that have occurred during the past 5*

John MacDonald's work on this article was funded through a cooperative agreement from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (1U49CE000773). Aaron Kofner and Adam Porrioni provided research assistance. The authors are also indebted to the Los Angeles Police Department for providing the data used in this article and the background of the intervention studied. The opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors only. The figures in this manuscript were originally created by the authors in color although they appear in this issue in black and white. The authors will be pleased to provide any reader with color copies of the figures if desired. Direct correspondence to Richard Berk, Department of Criminology, University of Pennsylvania, 3718 Locust Walk, McNeil Building, Suite 483, Philadelphia, PA 19104-6286 (e-mail: berkr@sas.upenn.edu); John MacDonald, Department of Criminology, University of Pennsylvania, 3718 Locus Walk, McNeil Building, Suite 483, Philadelphia, PA (e-mail: johnmm@sas.upenn.edu).

*years following a number of major policy reforms. We suggest that researchers should look more closely at the targeted interventions the LAPD has undertaken for evidence-based examples of effective policing. Importantly, this work suggests that crime associated with homeless encampments can be meaningfully reduced with targeted police actions. However, law enforcement actions do not address the roots of homelessness nor most of its consequences. Getting tough on the homeless should not be confused with policies or programs that respond fundamentally to the social and personal problems that homelessness presents.*

### **Keywords**

*police, place-based policing, homelessness, generalized additive model*

A growing body of evaluation research supports the practical benefits of place-based policing. Yet, scholars are often critical of such approaches in part because they may shift the burden of crime to other areas. Perhaps most directly, crime displacement can result from geographically targeted police crackdowns (Sherman, 1990), although displacement appears to be less problematic when place-based policing is attuned to the local criminal environment (Weisburd, Wyckoff, Ready, Eck, Hinkle, and Gajewski, 2006). As Weisburd et al. (2006) noted, crime does not just move around the corner. More fundamentally, there is little reason to expect that police interventions alone change underlying social and economic factors that contribute to crime. Effective police interventions that focus on local crime environments can make a short-term difference in a given locale (Skogan, 1990), but on larger spatial and temporal scales, there will usually be little change.

These issues are particularly relevant for this article. For years, downtown Los Angeles has been characterized in part by a sizable homeless population (Berk, Kriegler, and Ylvisaker, 2008) concentrated in an area commonly referred to as “Skid Row” (Magnano and Blasi, 2007). Crime and disorder have been stable features of Skid Row life. Open-air drug markets, prostitution, nightly robberies, drug overdoses, theft, and vandalism have been common. Local merchants have long lobbied for a tougher response from the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD; see Harcourt, 2005, for some history). In the fall of 2005, they got their wish.

The majority of Los Angeles city services for the homeless are located in downtown Los Angeles. These providers and other stakeholders speak with many different voices about the needs of the homeless and how best to respond (Koegel, Burnam, and Farr, 1988; Wenzel, Koegel, and Gelberg, 2000). There are also, not surprisingly, some basic disagreements and battles over turf. But no one would argue that a crackdown on the homeless could be more than a temporary and partial measure, and some complain that law enforcement resources might be better spent providing additional social services to the homeless (Blasi, 2007). As important as these debates may be, they neglect three logical prior key questions. Did the LAPD interventions intended to reduce the crime associated with the Skid Row encampments really reduce crime? If they

did, how large were the reductions, and were they true reductions or merely displacements? In this article, we attempt to provide some answers.

## **Background**

That crime and place are closely linked is indisputable (Braga and Weisburd, 2010; Weisburd, Bruinsma, and Bernasco, 2009). More than a century of empirical research in the United States and Europe has demonstrated that crime is geographically concentrated (see Weisburd et al., 2009, for a review). Theoretical explanations at various spatial levels have followed (Sampson, 1995; Taylor, 2001; Welsh and Hoshi, 2002). Practical applications of this knowledge have also been developed. Perhaps most notable is a focus of police resources on crime “hot spots” or areas of particularly high crime concentrations (Sherman, Gartin, and Buerger, 1989). Although police actions directed at specific persons or crimes have produced mixed results (Sherman, 1990), a number of studies point to consistent effects from spatially based police interventions (see Braga, 2001; Weisburd and Eck, 2004, for reviews).

The place-based policing approach can also be directed at social disorder. Within a “broken windows” framework (Kelling and Bratton, 1998), cracking down on street prostitution and open-air drug markets, for instance, can reduce crime more generally. There can also be reductions in fear of crime coupled with a growing sense of social control (Bratton and Kelling, 2006). There is some empirical support for these claims (Braga and Bond, 2008), although the literature hardly speaks with one voice (Harcourt and Ludwig, 2006).

Social incivilities are common in areas with homeless encampments, which are often associated with public intoxication, loitering, aggressive panhandling, and public urination. Drug use and prostitution can be widespread. It is not surprising, therefore, that homeless encampments are associated with a clustering of prospective crime perpetrators and crime victims (Miethe and Meyer, 1990; Sampson and Lauritsen, 1990; Wenzel et al., 2000). It follows that homeless individuals themselves have significantly higher rates of criminal victimization than individuals who have a place to live (Felson, 2002; Koegel et al., 1988; Kushel, Evans, Perry, Robertson, and Moss, 2003). A key implication for crime prevention is that the concentration of homeless in a jurisdiction is at least as important as their numbers.

A common criticism for place-based policing strategies is that they are myopic. The underlying causes of crime are not addressed, although several policing scholars have argued that the police can, in principle, influence systemic issues under certain circumstances (Eck and Spelman, 1987; Goldstein, 1990). Perhaps more to the point, reductions in crime are a desirable goal and one for which police are well suited. Also, there is nothing about police-initiated attempts to reduce crime that necessarily preclude more fundamental interventions by other agencies. In short, there is little that the police can do to “solve” the problem of homelessness. But perhaps well-designed policing strategies can reduce some of its undesirable consequences. Whether in this case the resources allocated to the police might be better used to address root problems (National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2009) is an important issue, but it is not one that can be appropriately addressed here.

### The Safer Cities Initiative

Los Angeles County has the largest number of homeless individuals of any county in the United States (Berk et al., 2008). Consistent with historical trends (Rossi, 1989), the population of homeless is very heterogeneous. According to the Los Angeles Almanac (2009), the County homeless population demonstrates the following characteristics:

1. An average age of approximately 40
2. Nearly 50% with a high-school education
3. Is at least 33% female
4. Is at least 20% composed of families
5. Has approximately 20% with disabilities
6. Has at least 16% employed
7. Has approximately 25% mentally ill
8. Has at least 33% with substance abuse problems

A large fraction of the Los Angeles County homeless population can be found in the City of Los Angeles, with the highest concentration by far on Skid Row. It is likely that the Skid Row population has many features in common with the County population, with perhaps a greater density of disadvantage. Crime problems that go well beyond mere nuisance are rampant. Open-air drug markets, prostitution, robbery gangs, theft, and vandalism are common. Until recently, these Skid Row conditions went largely unaddressed.

Starting in 2004, widespread media and public policy attention began to highlight the conditions surrounding homelessness in the downtown section of Los Angeles' Skid Row ("Full Coverage," 2009). Notable stories in the *Los Angeles Times* described dirty needles littering the streets, prostitution conducted in public porta potties placed in Skid Row, robbery gangs targeting homeless individuals for their disability checks, drug-related overdoses, and frequent violence (Lopez, 2005). Local merchants and private developers were particularly vocal about these and a variety of related problems (Harcourt, 2005).

In September 2005, the LAPD pilot tested an effort to clean up the area. The intervention was officially named the Safer Cities Initiative (SCI) and was a hallmark of Chief William Bratton's "broken windows" approach (Bratton, 1998; Wilson and Kelling, 1982) targeting well-defined geographical locations. Under the direction of Captain Jodi Wakefield, a pilot program called the "Main Street Pilot Project" was intended to reduce the density of homeless encampments through fines and citations. Encampments located in the Historic Core section of downtown Los Angeles (S. Main Street between 4th and 7th streets) were deemed to be a public health nuisance, and sanctions were authorized by a Los Angeles city statute.<sup>1</sup>

The LAPD also cracked down on crimes such as public intoxication, drug use, and prostitution that made the area congenial for criminal predators. Starting in October, the LAPD

---

1. The Los Angeles municipal code notes, "No person shall sit, lie or sleep in or upon any street, sidewalk or other public way" (L.A., CAL., MUN. CODE 41.18(d)). The use of this municipal code to arrest homeless persons explicitly was deemed a violation of the 8th Amendment by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals (*Jones v. City of Los Angeles*, 2006; see McMorris, 2006).

placed four to five officers on foot in the Historic Core section of downtown who were to focus exclusively on general nuisance crimes and basic order maintenance. There followed a further increase in police presence with the introduction of one of the LAPD's mobile police command stations, commonly referred to as "Big Blue." In addition, undercover vice teams were placed in the areas known for open-air drug markets and for prostitution. Finally, a special undercover squad focused on local robberies (John MacDonald, personal communication, June 8, 2009).

After the pilot phase was implemented largely as designed and with anecdotal evidence of success, the LAPD officially launched the full-scale version of the SCI on September 17, 2006 by placing 50 full-time officers on the street in downtown Los Angeles. Just as in the Main Street Project, the officers were deployed only to downtown Los Angeles. The officers worked eastward through the Skid Row section, breaking up homeless encampments, issuing citations, and making arrests for violations of the law. The plan was to clear out specific street areas, maintain a visible police presence for at least a week, and then move onto other parts of downtown. The dedicated officers also worked closely with two vice units (Narcotics Buy Team and Field Enforcement Section).

The immediate goals of the SCI were demonstrably achieved. The Skid Row homeless encampments were cleared. The concentration of homeless individuals was dispersed. The debris they left behind was removed. But what about crime in downtown Los Angeles? Was there a reduction? According to LAPD internal documents and media reports (see LAPD, 2008a, 2008b), homeless-related drug overdoses, murders, and reported crimes dropped the year after the intervention.

However, the program was not independently and rigorously evaluated, and there were many skeptics (Blasi, 2007). In this article, we report the results of an independent, empirical evaluation. We consider the possible crime reduction impact of the Main Street Project, which served as the pilot, and of the SCI. The following three broad types of crime are examined:

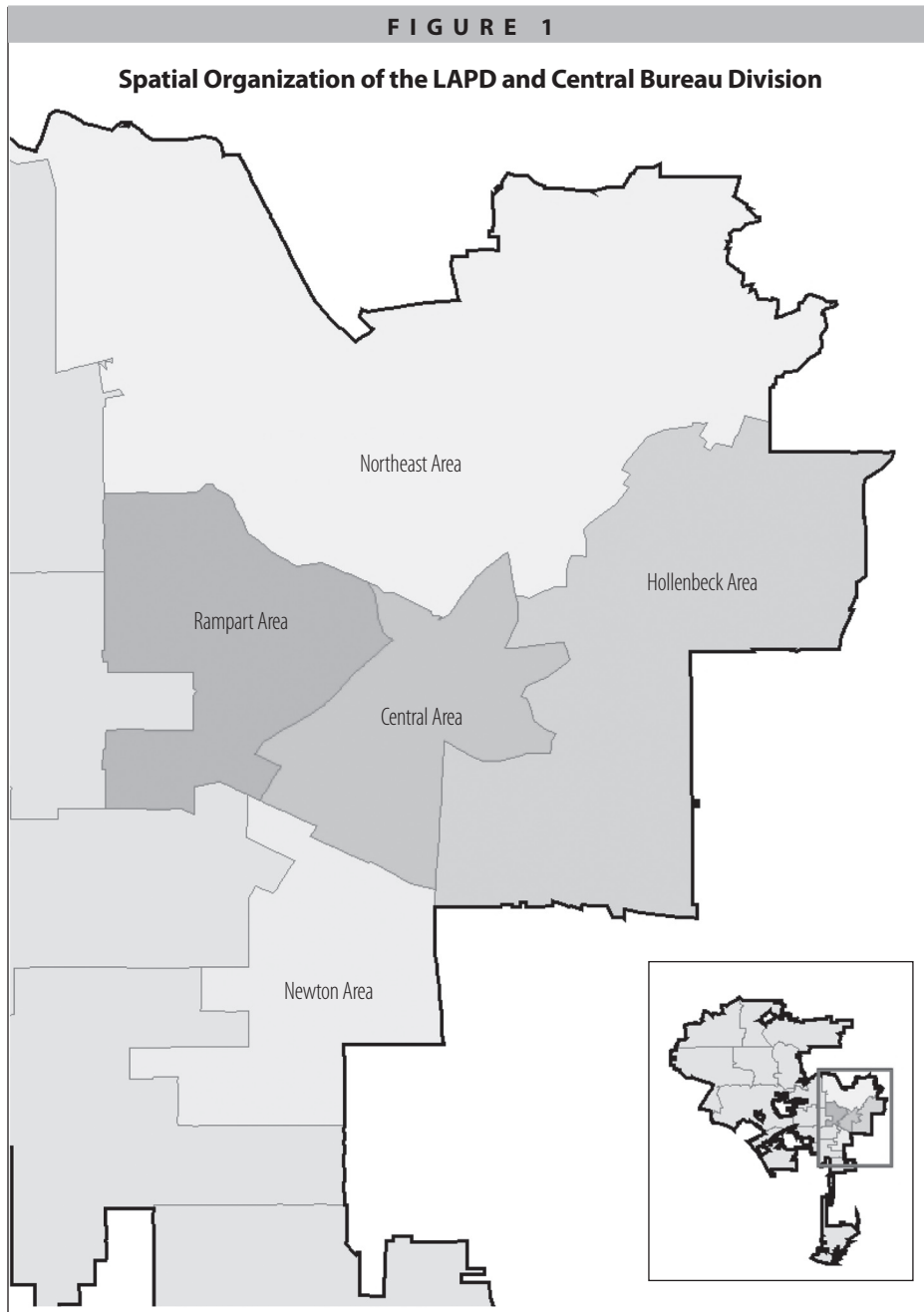
1. Nuisance crime
2. Violent crime
3. Property crime

We also consider possible effects on four areas adjacent to downtown.

## **Research Methods**

### *Research Design*

The unit of observation and analysis for this study is the Police Division. The LAPD is organized into four Police Bureaus and, within them, 19 divisions. The LAPD intervention was implemented in the Central Division, which is part of the Central Bureau. The Central Division contains much of the downtown area, including large office and city government buildings and their support services, light industry, and a mixture of residential housing. The Central Division also contains several square blocks of shops patronized by people of modest means living near downtown. And the division contains Los Angeles' Skid Row. The Central Division is the experimental unit.



As shown in Figure 1, the Central Division is bordered by four other Central Bureau Police Divisions: Northeast, Rampart, Hollenbeck, and Newton. These divisions contain a mixture of moderate-to-low income households and a mixture of industrial and commercial establishments. The four Divisions contiguous to the Central Division will serve as the comparison units because of their proximity to downtown, their broad similarities with many important spatial and demographic features with the Central Division, and their shared command structure under the Central Bureau.

For each of the divisions, we have three time series of crime counts by week: the number of violent crimes, the number of property crimes, and the number of nuisance crimes, which are often associated with the homeless.<sup>2</sup> We consider different kinds of crimes because although common lore has the homeless as perpetrators of a wide variety of nuisance crimes, they can also be perpetrators and victims of very serious crimes. An important question, therefore, is whether all crimes can be affected by the interventions or just nuisance crimes. Although the immediate goal of dispersing the homeless was achieved, the homeless are hardly the only crime victims and perpetrators in downtown Los Angeles. Even if homeless-related crimes are affected, other factors may dominate any local trends for certain kinds of crimes.

The three time series for the Central Division serve as three outcome variables for the experimental group. The three time series for each of the four contiguous divisions serve as three “non-equivalent no-treatment control group time series” in a quasi-experimental design (Shadish, Cook, and Campbell, 2002: 181–184). Crime patterns over time that the control divisions share with the experimental division should not be a direct result of interventions that were introduced only in the experimental division. But if ignored, they risk being confounded with any effects of the interventions. In principle, the confounding effects can be removed by regression-based covariance adjustments. Precisely how we will do this is discussed shortly.<sup>3</sup>

There are 419 weeks of data starting on January 1, 2000 and ending on December 31, 2007. The first and last weeks are dropped because they were not a full 7 days. The timing of the LAPD Main Street Project for Skid Row and the SCI was determined through several conversations with the LAPD captain in charge of both, who in turn consulted staff activity logs (J. MacDonald, personal communication, 2009).

The formal start of the SCI was easy to document. It began in week 351 and continued through the end of 2007. The start of the pilot program was far more ambiguous. On September 27, 2005, the Main Street Project officially began (week 300). Skid Row porta potties were

2. Violent crime included aggravated assault (57.7%), homicide (1.4%), rape (2.3%), and robbery (38.6%). Property crimes included burglary (12.8%), theft from vehicles (25.3%), attempted burglary (25.7%), grand theft auto (21.2%), and larceny theft (14.5%). Nuisance crime included disturbance (0.8%), lewd conduct (1.3%), petty theft (40.4%), pickpocketing (1.8%), trespassing (4.6%), and vandalism (51.1%).
3. Even though we are working with time series data, we will not be employing a conventional “time series analysis.” We will be employing a form of semiparametric time series regression. In addition, the broader comparability of our experimental and comparison police divisions is not directly pertinent. The question is whether the intervention in the Central Division is affecting crime trends over and above whatever is driving crime trends in all of the divisions that comprise the Central Bureau.

removed beginning on October 26, 2005 (week 304). On November 16, 2005 (week 307), the LAPD added 43 recruit officers to walk beats en mass on Skid Row. However, several weeks before the official announcement, the proposed pilot program was being widely discussed by the media. Moreover, a variety of stakeholders were already involved so that by the middle of August 2005, it was widely known that a police initiative to clear Skid Row of the homeless was imminent. It may well make sense, therefore, to make week 294 (or so) the starting date for the pilot program. Week 294 is 6 weeks before the Main Street Project began officially.

### *The Statistical Model*

Over the next several pages, our statistical methods will be discussed in some detail. In the end, we are “just” doing a regression analysis. Readers who are prepared to leave it at that might wish to skip to Table 1 and the surrounding text. Because we do not know the functions by which the crime time series for the comparison divisions may be related to crime time series for the experimental division, we apply the generalized additive model (GAM). The GAM allows functional forms for the relationship between quantitative regressors and the response to be inductively determined from the data (Hastie and Tibshirani, 1990).<sup>4</sup> The GAM in this application can take the following form separately for each of three crime categories:

$$y_{c,t} = e^{\left[ \alpha_{c,0} + \alpha_{c,1} I_{1,t} + \alpha_{c,2} I_{2,t} + \sum_{d=1}^4 f_{c,d}(x_{c,d,t}) \right]} + \epsilon_{c,t} \quad (1)$$

Where:

$c$  is an index for one of the three kinds of crime

$t$  is an index for week

$d$  is an index for one of the four comparison divisions

$y_{c,t}$  is the response crime count by week for one of the three kinds of crime

$I_{1,t}$  an indicator variable coded as “1” for the period in which the Main Street Project was in place, and “0” otherwise

$I_{2,t}$  an indicator variable coded as “1” for the period in which the SCI was in place and “0” otherwise

$f_{c,d}(x_{c,d,t})$  is an inductively generated relationship between the crime time series  $c$  for comparison division  $d$  and the experimental crime time series  $c$

$\epsilon_{c,t}$  is a random Poisson disturbance meeting the usual regression assumptions

The parameter  $\alpha_{c,0}$  is the usual intercept for crime type  $c$ . The parameter  $\alpha_{c,1}$  will capture the direction and size of any average shift up or down in  $y_{c,t}$  associated with the introduction of the Main Street Project. As such, it can provide an estimate of the pilot program’s treatment effect for crime type  $c$ . The parameter  $\alpha_{c,2}$  will capture the direction and size of any average shift up

4. There are no functional form issues for the categorical predictors because they are not quantitative. However, transformations of the response are on the table.



or down in  $y_{c,t}$  associated with the introduction of the SCI. As such, it can provide an estimate of the SCI's treatment effect for crime type  $c$ . More complicated treatment functions can be formulated, and if necessary, time-related patterns that are unique to the Central Division, but not associated with the intervention, can be removed through additional terms in Equation 1. The systematic part of Equation 1 is exponentiated consistent with the conventional log-link function for Poisson regression (Hastie and Tibshirani, 1990: 139).

There can be no regression coefficients associated with the functions of quantitative covariates. Any information in a single regression coefficient would be automatically incorporated in the inductively constructed functional form. Moreover, for nonlinear functions, there is not one regression coefficient but many; indeed, a limitless number under many circumstances. The derivative of the function at each predictor value is a slope.

In practice, the inductive functions are likely to be rather smooth. Consequently, the covariance adjustments will control for relatively smooth temporal patterns in crime that the experimental division shares with the comparison divisions. Sharp discontinuities are usually not well captured or can be missed altogether. We will return to this issue later.

The key elements of Equation 1, as in any regression model, are the properties of  $\varepsilon_t$ . In particular, there is here the real possibility of dependence within the disturbances of the response time series. Such dependence can undermine statistical inference. Equation 1 assumes implicitly that such dependence is removed by covariance adjustments using the four comparison time series. Insofar as the temporal dependence for the crime counts in any of the comparison divisions is similar to the temporal dependence for the crime counts in the experimental time series, it will be eliminated. But the possibility of any dependence remaining is an empirical matter we will address below.

### *Estimation Procedures*

Obtaining estimates of the regression parameters of Equation 1 while also obtaining estimates of the functional forms for the covariates complicates matters. In the same spirit as the generalized linear model, a form of iteratively reweighted least squares is used. However, the usual regression sum of squares is "penalized" (Wood, 2008: 500).<sup>5</sup> A penalty is introduced so that an appropriate degree of smoothing is achieved for the functional forms to be estimated. The intent is to balance the variance that comes from not smooth enough against the bias that comes from smoothing too much. The more weight given to the penalty, the smoother the function. The less weight given to the penalty, the rougher the function. The weight arrived at is usually determined by some measure of out-of-sample performance, such as the cross-validation statistic.

5. The function to be minimized is  $\| \mathbf{W}(\mathbf{z}-\mathbf{X}\boldsymbol{\beta}) \|^2 + \sum \lambda_j \boldsymbol{\beta}^T \mathbf{S}_j \boldsymbol{\beta}$ , where  $\mathbf{W}$  is a diagonal weight matrix as usual,  $\mathbf{z}$  is the adjusted response for the given iteration,  $\mathbf{X}$  is a matrix of regressors including the design matrix for the splines associated with each of the smoothing functions,  $\boldsymbol{\beta}$  is a vector of coefficients whose values are to be estimated,  $\lambda_j$  is a weight given to the penalty function for the  $j$ th function that is also to be estimated, and  $\mathbf{S}_j$  is a conventional smoothing matrix. The term on the left is just the usual weighted sum of squares. The term on the right imposes a penalty that increases as the functions to be estimated become more complex. It is the second term that makes estimation different from iteratively reweighted least squares applied to the generalized linear model.

To summarize, separately for each crime type  $c$  we are seeking the values of  $\alpha_{c,0}$  through  $\alpha_{c,2}$  and the four functions of crime in the comparison divisions that iteratively minimize a penalized sum of squares. A formal discussion penalized regression splines can be found in Green and Silverman (1994) and in Hastie, Tibshirani, and Friedman (2009: section 5.4). The GAM implementation we used is discussed in Wood (2008). Berk (2008: ch. 2) provides a very accessible introduction to penalized fitting functions.

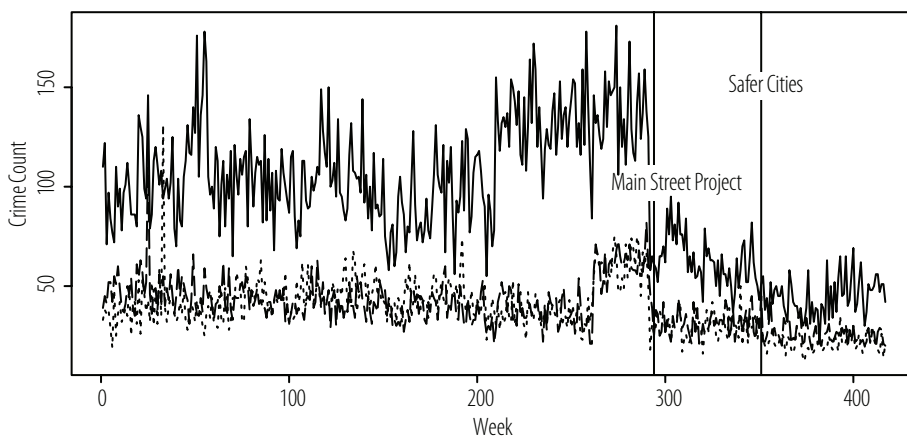
## Results

The analysis was undertaken in several steps. These steps are presented in some detail for the nuisance crime outcome to help make our methods more transparent. We proceed much more rapidly through the results for violent crimes and property crimes. Readers familiar with our statistical methods, or for whom the didactic material is not a high priority, might want to go directly to Table 1 and the surrounding discussion.

Figure 2 shows the three crime time series for the Central Division. A vertical line for the

**FIGURE 2**

### Crime Multiple Times Series for the Central Division

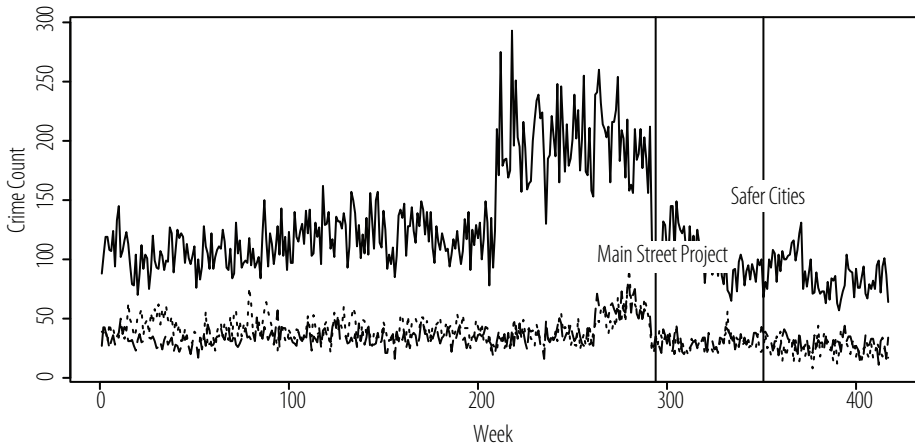


Crime Counts for the Central Division:

Solid lines = Property crime    Dotted lines = Violent crime    Dashed lines = Nuisance crime

start of each intervention is overlaid. It is clear that all three time series varied considerably over the study period. Property crime (solid lines) ranged from a low of 21 crimes in a week to a high of 181 crimes in a week. There is a very large drop in all three crimes about the time when the (pilot) Main Street Project began and a much smaller downward shift about the time the SCI was introduced. The three time series for the Central Division have broadly similar temporal patterns with between series correlations ranging from 0.50 to 0.59.

FIGURE 3

**Crime Multiple Times Series for the Hollenbeck Division**

Crime counts for the Hollenbeck Division:  
 Solid lines = Property crime    Dotted lines = Violent crime    Dashed lines = Nuisance crime

One might be tempted to conclude that the Main Street Project and the SCI had important effects on all three time crime types. In other work (Berk and MacDonald, 2009), however, we found some patterns citywide that are also evident in the four comparison divisions. For example, Figure 3 shows the comparable plot for the Hollenbeck Division. Note that the large increase around week 200 and the large decrease around week 300 correspond substantially to the dramatic rise and subsequent fall in Figure 2.

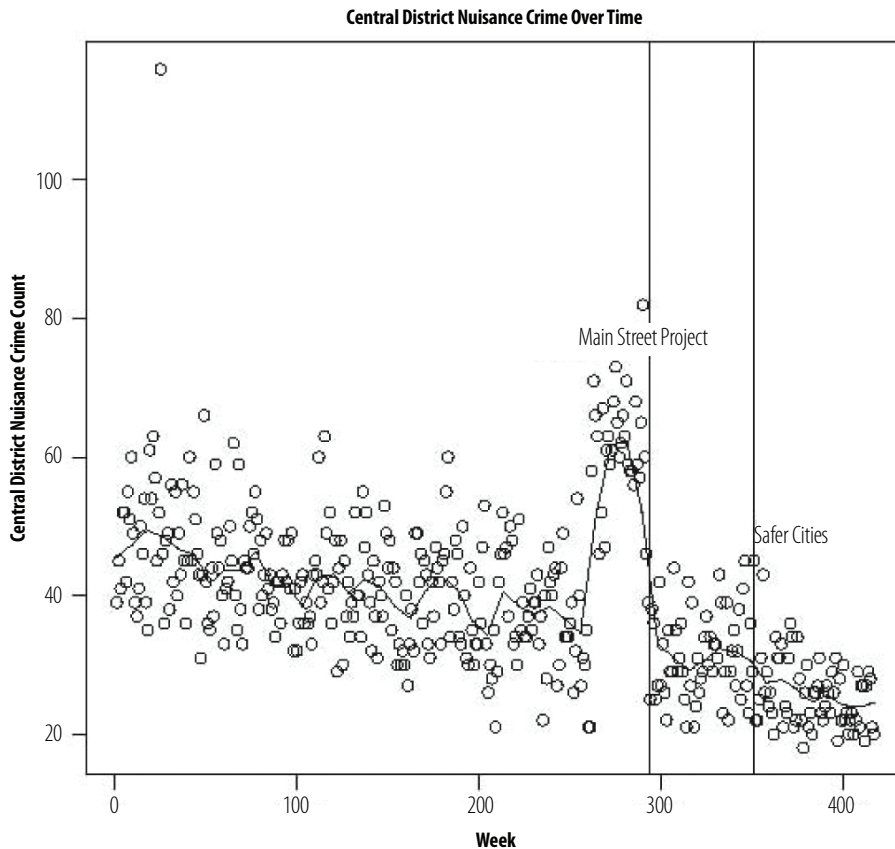
**Results for Nuisance Crime**

Figure 4 plots the nuisance crime time series by week and overlays a lowess smoother. There is again a dramatic increase several months before any of the interventions are in place followed by a significant drop in crime associated with the Main Street Project and perhaps a small drop in crime associated with the SCI. However, as already suggested, much of the variation over time is shared with the four adjacent police divisions and even the city overall. Were that variation removed, the patterns might differ substantially. For the requisite covariance adjustments, we turn to the GAM. The nuisance crime counts by week for each of the four comparison divisions serve as the covariates. The intervention variables are not yet included.

Figure 5 shows for didactic purposes the residualized nuisance crime produced by the model. Once again, a lowess smoother is overlaid. The difference between Figure 5 and Figure 4 is striking. For example, the large shift upward around week 260 and the large shift downward around week 300 both are gone. That pattern was shared with other police divisions in the Central Bureau and has been removed. Visually, at least, the covariance adjustments appear to be effective, and there are suggestions of relatively small intervention effects.

FIGURE 4

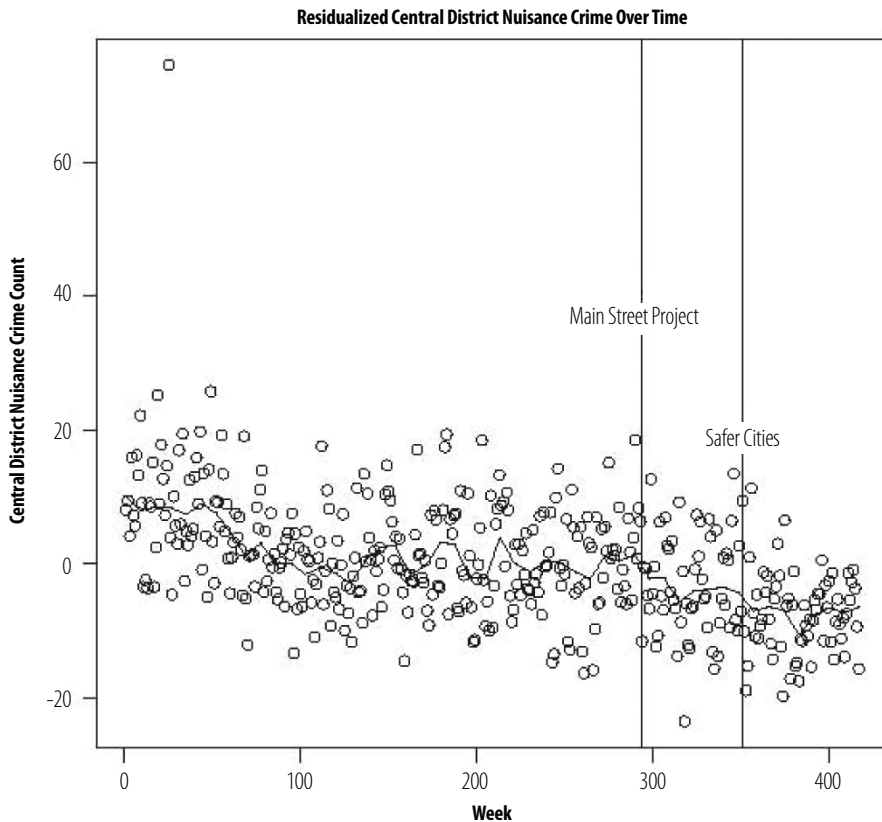
**Nuisance Crime Counts for Central Division with no Covariance Adjustments and an Overlaid Lowess Smoother**



Yet, there is also some evidence for a gradual downward trend unique to the Central Division. Were that not taken into account, the average of the number of nuisance crimes before the two interventions would be higher than the average number of crimes after the two interventions because of the trend, not because of the intervention. Prudence dictates addressing that time trend, which apparently is unique to the Central Division. Again for didactic purposes, Figure 6 is the result when a counter for week is included as an additional covariate. It seems now that the time series is very well behaved. Large-scale trends, even highly nonlinear trends, that the experimental Central Division shares with the four adjacent comparison divisions have been removed—so has the overall downward trend that is unique to the Central Division. We are now in a good position to consider any treatment effects characterized by change in level.

FIGURE 5

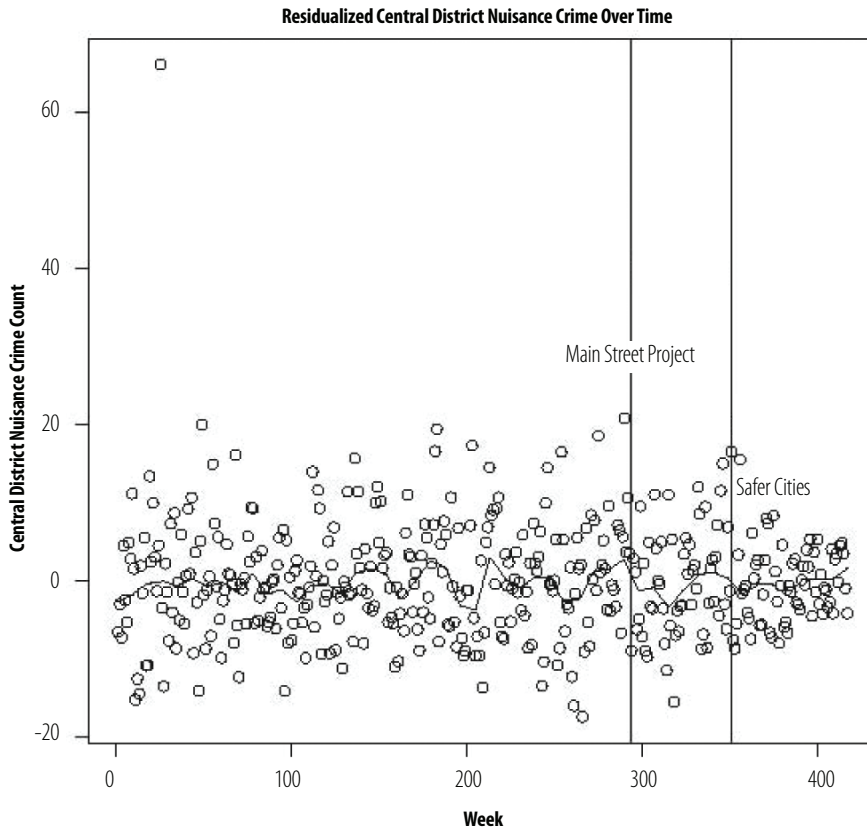
### Nuisance Crime Counts for Central Division after Covariance Adjustments with an Overlaid Lowess Smoother



We do this by applying the GAM to Equation 1. The residualizing process just described goes on behind the scenes so that covariance adjusted estimates of any treatment effects can be properly obtained. The model includes two treatment indicator variables and five covariates, one for the weekly totals for nuisance crimes in each of the four control police divisions and one that is a counter for week. The fit is constructed from the contributions of all seven regressors, only two of which are intended to capture any intervention effects. Overall, the fit is quite good, at least to the eye, and 64% of the deviance is accounted for by the model. The residuals were effectively independent, and there was no evidence of overdispersion. Figure 7 is a plot of the time series of the number of nuisance crimes in the Central Division with the GAM fitted values overlaid.

**FIGURE 6**

**Nuisance Crime Counts for Central Division after Covariance Adjustments Include Week with an Overlaid Lowess Smoother**



**FIGURE 7**

**Nuisance Crime Counts for Central Division with Fitted Values Overlaid**

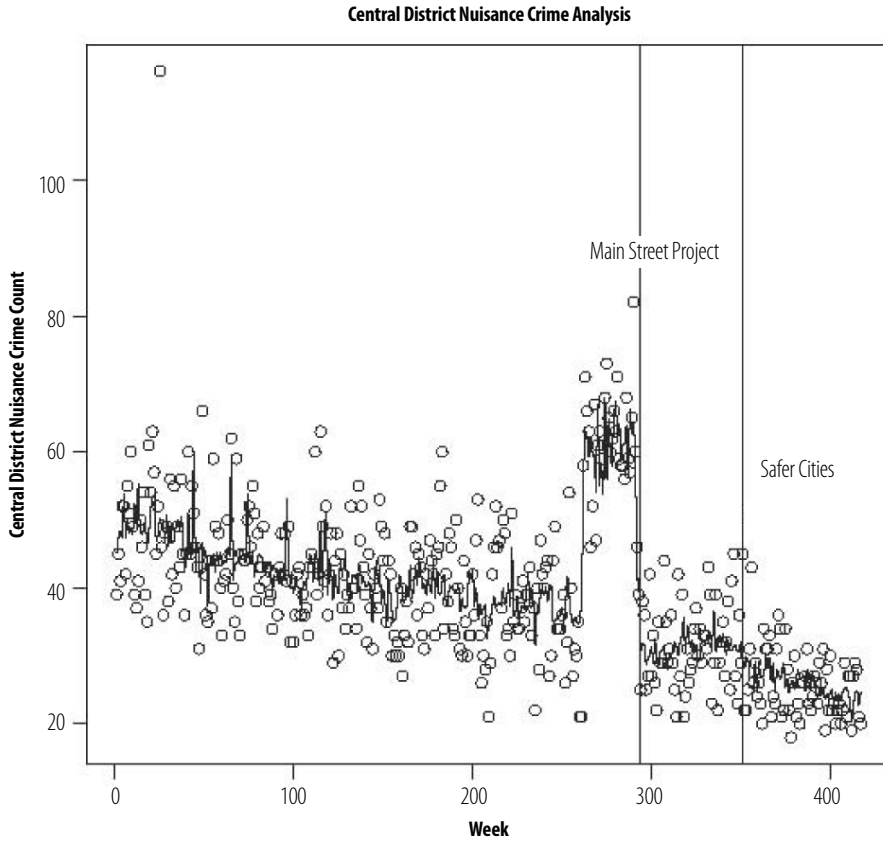


Table 1 contains the key parameter estimates. As noted earlier, a penalized regression spline smoother (represented by an “s” in the table) was used for each covariate as part of the fitting process. Conditional Poisson disturbances were assumed along with the canonical log-link function.

**T A B L E 1**

**GAM Results for Nuisance Crime in the Central Division: Log Link and Poisson Disturbances (N = 417, 64% of the Deviance Accounted for)**

Variable	Estimate	EDF	p Value
Constant	3.74	1.0	>.001
Main Street Pilot Project	-0.27	1.0	.002
Safer Cities Initiative	-0.36	1.0	.004
s(Week)	-	6.5	>.001
s(Hollenbeck)	-	4.0	.159
s(Northeast)	-	2.2	.002
s(Newton)	-	1.0	.089
s(Rampart)	-	7.9	.014

Consider first the five covariates. They are of little substantive interest. Their role is to remove crime trends that the Central Division shares with any of the four adjacent divisions and overall time trends that are unique to the Central Division. Moreover, their relationships with the response are very difficult to interpret because they are the result of several covariance adjustments. How would one think about, for example, the relationship between the number of nuisance crimes in the Central Division and the number of nuisance crimes in the Hollenbeck Division with the crime trends in the other three comparison divisions held constant?

Rather, the issues are methodological. All but one have effective degrees of freedom (EDF) greater than 1.0.<sup>6</sup> This indicates that all of the partial response functions except for the Newton Division are nonlinear, some dramatically so.<sup>7</sup> If a conventional parametric form of regression had been used, such as Poisson regression, then the assumed functions for the covariates would likely be very wrong. Incomplete covariance adjustments would have followed along with badly biased estimates of any treatment effects.

As an example, consider the partial response function for the number of nuisance crimes in the Rampart Division, which is shown Figure 8. The solid line is the estimated function, and the dotted lines are 95% error bands.<sup>8</sup> There is a rug plot at the base of the figure to show

6. EDF is a generalization of the usual degrees of freedom concept. Loosely speaking, the EDF indicates how many degrees of freedom are being “used up” by the estimated function. The EDF does not have to be a whole number.

7. When the EDF is 1.0, the functional form is linear.

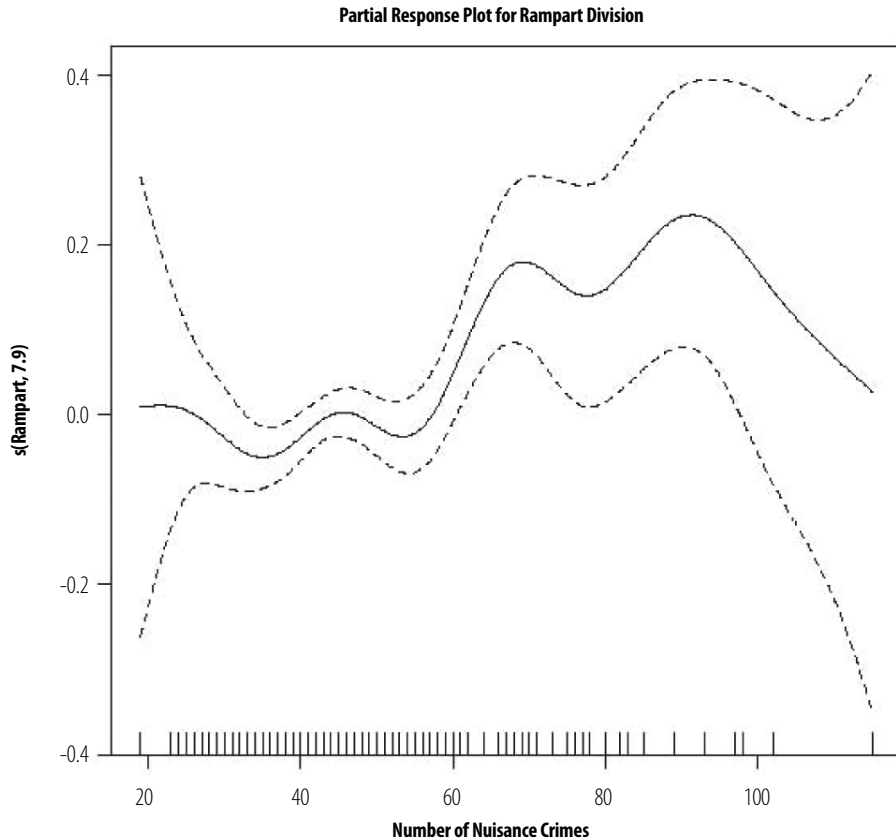
8. The error bands are constructed point by point. They are an attempt to represent approximately the interval in which 95% of the fitted values would fall were it possible to repeat the study, independent of all other studies, a very large number of times. Each is not a conventional 95% confidence interval because there is likely to be some unknown amount of bias in the fitted values resulting from the bias-variance trade-off.



roughly how the regressor is distributed. The vertical axis represents the fitted values in centered log units. The label indicates that a smoother has been applied to the Rampart covariate and that the function uses up 7.9 EDF.

**FIGURE 8**

**Partial Response Function for Nuisance Crimes in the Rampart Division**



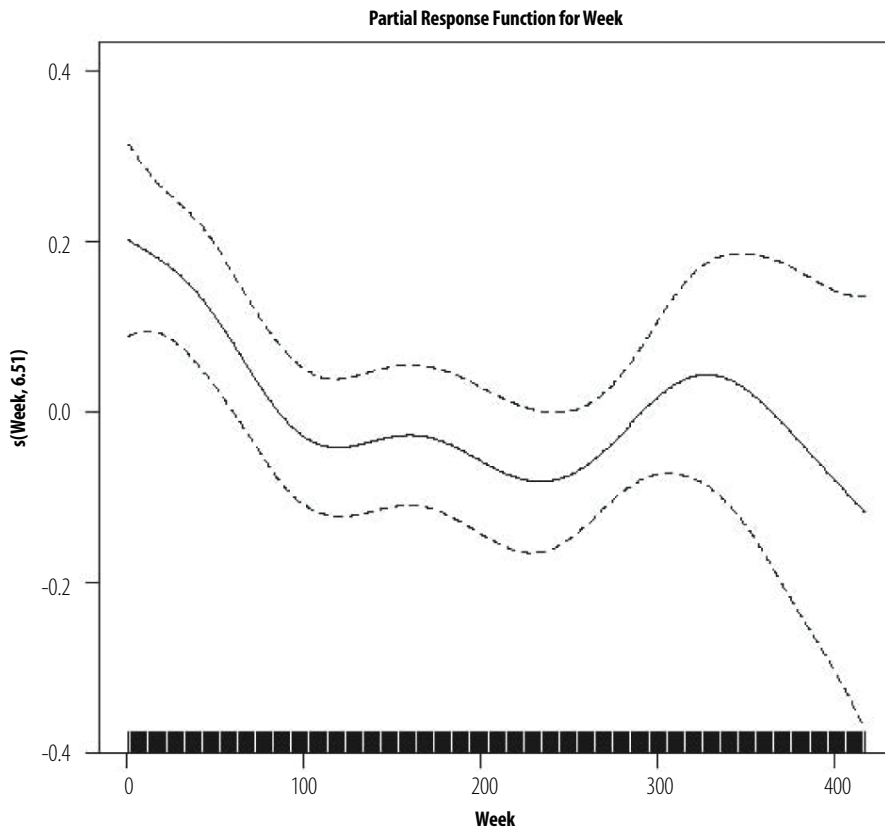
Taking the error bands into account, Figure 8 shows that for the Rampart Division, the partial response function is approximately flat until about 60 nuisance crimes per week. Between 60 and nearly 100 crimes per week, the function is increasing. There are so few weeks with more than 100 nuisance crimes that, as the very wide error band indicates, the apparent decline should not be taken seriously.

Figure 9 shows the partial response function for week, which captures any overall time trends in the Central Division with temporal crime patterns in the comparison divisions held constant. The trend is down or flat, except for the period between approximately week 250

and week 320. The sharp downward trend beginning around the time that the pilot study was fully in place may actually represent a treatment effect. An upward trend in nuisance crimes was reversed. However, our model assumes that any treatment effects are changes in level, not slope, and we hesitate to respecify after looking at the results. That would be data snooping (Freedman, 2005: section 4.9). Should the change in slope be a real treatment effect, the likely consequence for our model is to underestimate any beneficial effects for the two interventions.

**FIGURE 9**

**Partial Response Function for Week**



The top three rows of Table 1 contain results for the constant and the two treatment indicators. The parameter estimates for the interventions can be interpreted just as one would for Poisson regression within the generalized linear model. The Main Street Project regression coefficient of  $-0.27$  translates into a count multiplier of  $0.76$ . With the introduction of the pilot program, the number of nuisance crimes in the Central Division is on the average approximately 76% of what it had been before the pilot program was introduced. The associated  $p$  value is

.002. The SCI regression coefficient of  $-0.36$  translates into a count multiplier of  $0.70$ . With the introduction of SCI, the number of nuisance crimes is, on average, approximately 70% of what it had been before either of the interventions had been introduced. The associated  $p$  value is .004.

Recall that the starting date for the Main Street Project was difficult to precisely define and perhaps could have been moved several weeks in either direction. Not surprisingly, the estimated effects of both programs depend on the starting date for the Main Street Project. As the starting date is moved toward the starting date for the SCI, the variance of the Main Street Project indicator is necessarily reduced. A reduction in a regressor's variance can introduce greater instability into any treatment effect estimates and reduces statistical power. Moreover, because in this case all of the regressors are correlated, changing one estimate affects all estimates. Suffice it to say, moving the starting date of the Main Street Project a week or two in either direction makes no important difference. This is good because our chosen start date is probably accurate within plus or minus a week or two. But moving the starting date several weeks forward or back can change the story. Indeed, moving the starting date for the Main Street Project 6 weeks forward in time can essentially remove any nuisance crime treatment effects for either intervention. But in so doing, one would have to assume that the Main Street Project was sprung on the Central Division with no advance warning whatsoever and without any prior media coverage and related public controversy. Facts to the contrary are readily available.

Interpreting the treatment effect  $p$  values also requires some caution. As noted earlier, statistical inference for GAM can be difficult to justify because the model is arrived at inductively (Leeb and Pötscher, 2005, 2006, 2008; Berk et al., 2009). However, the  $p$  values for the two interventions are so small that even if they biased downward by a factor of 10, one would still reject the conventional null hypothesis.<sup>9</sup> For these, the conclusions from the statistical tests are perhaps sound. Moreover, the analyses to which we now turn provide at least indirect support for our procedures.

### *Results for Violent Crime*

Having gone through the analysis of nuisance crimes in considerable depth, we can move very quickly through the analyses for violent crime and property crime. Applying the same steps and analysis procedures as used for nuisance crimes, Table 2 shows the results for violent crimes. All of the preliminary and intermediate results anticipating Table 2 broadly replicate the preliminary and intermediate steps for nuisance crime. As before, the regression diagnostics were favorable. And once again, the story is to be found in the regression coefficients for the Main Street Project and the SCI.

---

9. For the two interventions, a one-tailed test is used.

TABLE 2

**GAM Results for Violent Crime in the Central Division: Log Link and Poisson Disturbances (N = 417, 68% of the Deviance Accounted for)**

Variable	Estimate	DF or EOF	p Value
Constant	3.70	1.0	>.001
Main Street Pilot Project	-0.17	1.0	.023
Safer Cities Initiative	-0.50	1.0	>.001
s(Week)	-	5.2	>.001
s(Hollenbeck)	-	5.4	>.001
s(Northeast)	-	6.9	>.001
s(Newton)	-	1.7	.102
s(Rampart)	-	2.6	.227

The average treatment effect estimates are roughly the same as found for nuisance crime. The Main Street Pilot regression coefficients of  $-0.17$  translate into a count multiplier of 0.84. With the introduction of the pilot program, the number of violent crimes in the Central Division is on average approximately 84% of what it had been before the pilot program was introduced. The associated  $p$  value is .02. The SCI regression coefficients of  $-0.50$  translate into a count multiplier of 0.61. With the introduction of SCI, the number of violent crimes is on average approximately 61% of what it had been before either of the interventions had been introduced. The associated  $p$  value is substantially less than .001. However, the same cautions noted for nuisance crimes still apply.

***Results for Property Crime***

Table 3 shows the results for property crime. Again, all of the preliminary and intermediate results anticipating Table 3 broadly replicate the preliminary and intermediate steps for nuisance crimes and are supported by favorable regression diagnostics. The Main Street Pilot regression coefficients are  $-0.25$ . The count multiplier is 0.78. With the introduction of the pilot program, the number of property crimes in the Central Division is on average approximately 78% of what it had been before the pilot program was introduced. The associated  $p$  value is .005. The SCI regression coefficient is  $-0.43$ , which translates into a count multiplier of 0.65. With the introduction of SCI, the number of property crimes is on average approximately 65% of what it had been before either of the interventions had been introduced. The associated  $p$  value is less than .001. In short, for all three kinds of crime, the estimated treatment effects are rather similar.

TABLE 3

**GAM Results for Property Crime in the Central Division: Log Link and Poisson Disturbances (N = 417, 81% of the Deviance Accounted for)**

Variable	Estimate	DF or EOF	p Value
Constant	4.57	1.0	>.001
Main Street Pilot Project	-0.25	1.0	.005
Safer Cities Initiative	-0.43	1.0	.001
s(Week)	-	8.4	>.001
s(Hollenbeck)	-	1.0	>.222
s(Northeast)	-	8.0	>.001
s(Newton)	-	6.8	>.01
s(Rampart)	-	6.1	.319

*Spillover Spatial Effects*

Finding treatment effects in the Central Division leaves unaddressed any impact the Main Street Project and the SCI may have had on the four adjacent police divisions. There are three clear possibilities. First, there may have been no impact whatsoever outside of the Central Division. Second, there may have been crime displacement manifested by crime increases in the four adjacent police divisions about the same time the LAPD intervened in the Central Division. Before looking at the data, we were somewhat skeptical of the displacement hypothesis because of our view that crime associated with homelessness depended substantially on homeless density, and there were apparently no new, large homeless encampments in the comparison divisions after the interventions. There was certainly nothing on the scale of Skid Row.

Third, the interventions in the Central Division may have had spillover effects manifested by crime reductions in the four adjacent police divisions about the same time as the LAPD intervened in the Central Division. Although there were no large-scale encampments on the adjacent divisions, there were areas where homeless individuals tended to congregate. Perhaps these would be the areas that would have been affected. Before looking at the data, spillover effects seemed like a real possibility because word of the police crackdown would spread quickly among the homeless and related stakeholders. In addition, police officers in the comparison divisions might have been empowered and motivated to aggressively intervene with new homeless encampments that spilled over into their divisions.

To address these three possibilities, we proceeded much as before. The response variables were the three kind of crime counts in each the four comparison divisions. The same two intervention variables were defined. Week and the corresponding crime count in the Central Division were the covariates. We essentially reversed the logic of the previous analyses. A total of 12 analyses followed (three kinds of crime by four comparison divisions).

In general, the same sort of intervention effects was found. There was absolutely no evidence for crime displacement. There was evidence for spillover effects. As a summary, Table 4 uses the sum of the three kinds of crime in the four comparison divisions as the response variable.

The sum of the three kinds of crime for the Central Division and week are the two covariates. The two treatment effect estimates imply a multiplier of approximately 0.75, which is about what we found previously.

There were no Main Street Project or SCI interventions in any other division but the Central. According to the LAPD, there were also no other law enforcement interventions in those divisions that could be confounded with what was going on in the Central, nor were there apparently any other sorts of interventions in the four comparison divisions starting around week 300. It is important to stress that for the crime reductions in the comparison divisions to be other than indirect spillover effects from the Central Division, the timing would have to be very similar. There would need to be a sharp beginning to the intervention around week 300.

**T A B L E 4**

**GAM Results for Total Crime for the Comparison Divisions Using Total Crim in the Central Division and Week as Regressors: Log Link and Poisson Disturbances (N = 417, 87% of the Deviance Accounted for)**

Variable	Estimate	DF or EOF	p Value
Constant	6.91	1.0	>.001
Main Street Pilot Project	-0.26	1.0	>.001
SCI	-0.23	1.0	>.001
s(Week)	-	8.62	>.001
s(Central Total Crime)	-	8.51	>.001

## Discussion

We have shown that broad time trends in certain crimes that the Central Division shares with its immediate neighbors can be effectively removed. It is then possible in principle to isolate processes unique to the Central Division. This is at least a good start. It follows that treatment effect estimates are consistent with meaningful but modest crime reductions for both the Main Street Project and the SCI for nuisance, violent, and property crimes.

Consider first the overall effects in the Central Division. Everything depends on the quality of the covariance adjustments that GAM implements. Highly nonlinear relationships with the response variable can be effectively taken into account even when they are unknown before the data are examined. Therefore, the key vulnerability is that there are one or more confounders having highly local temporal impacts on the amount of crime in the Central Division and that the local effects just happen to materialize around the time when both police initiatives were introduced. For example, had the City of Los Angeles instituted significant new ways to provide for the homeless at the same time that the police were trying to disperse them, it would be difficult to determine which interventions, if any, were reducing crime. Under such circumstances, the bias in our treatment effect estimates could be positive or negative. We might attribute to either of the interventions crime reduction effects that were not real or fail to find intervention effects that were real. We know of no such confounders, nor do our informants within

the LAPD. However, we cannot rule them out categorically. What is clear is that crime in the Central Division dropped very soon after both police interventions were introduced.

The apparent spillover effects complicate matters. One interpretation is that the Main Street Project and the SCI implemented in the Central Division led to more widespread but unofficial changes in police practices. It is also plausible that media and word-of-mouth descriptions of events in the Central Division dispersed collections of homeless individuals in at least the adjacent police divisions. These are true spillover effects that one might call indirect.

Another interpretation has already been anticipated. In all five police divisions in the Central Bureau or in the comparison divisions alone, one or more other interventions may have been introduced coinciding in time with the Main Street Project and the SCI. It is important to emphasize that such interventions would need to be sharply implemented around the same time as the two known police actions. The impact of any interventions with more gradual effects over longer time spans would likely be absorbed in the covariance adjustments. Again, we can find no evidence of interventions that the covariance adjustment would not be able to handle.

Some may find the treatment effects unsurprising. The large concentration of homeless individuals in downtown Los Angeles, and especially on Skid Row, contained a substantial pool of potential crime victims who were easy targets. Likewise, there was a substantial pool of potential crime perpetrators. The area was also a magnet for individuals with lawless inclinations. Dispersing the homeless population would seem, at face value, to be an obvious way to reduce crime in downtown Los Angeles. As already noted, more important for crime than the number of homeless in a city may be how much they are spatially concentrated. Areas characterized by a high density of homeless people may overwhelm local resources. It is one thing, for example, for a shopkeeper to ask a single homeless person not to camp right in front of the entrance to his or her establishment, and it is quite another to ask that of several individuals at once many times over the course of a working day. In the first case, there may be little disruption of customer traffic. In the second case, the disruption could be substantial. Therefore, one can view the two LAPD interventions primarily as a way to reduce the spatial density of homeless individuals, and one could have walked through Skid Row soon after the police intervened and plainly have observed over the time period for which we have data that the homeless encampment was no more.

Unaddressed, however, is whether it is good public policy more generally to have police break up concentrations of homeless individuals living on the streets. In our view, the wisdom of such police action depends on what services are made available for the homeless. There might be little objection to aggressive policing in the short term, for example, if there were a sufficient number of adequate shelters where homeless individuals might safely eat and sleep. Getting the homeless off the streets and into shelters is probably a sensible stop-gap approach. In practice, however, there will often be too few shelter beds. Then, the appropriate public policy will require difficult trade-offs. There is also the matter of costs. Police resources reallocated to Skid Row are not available elsewhere. In addition, there are secondary costs that come from processing

homeless individuals who are arrested and homeless individuals who are incarcerated. Far more is involved than the wages of patrol officers reassigned to Skid Row.

### Conclusions

On balance, there is evidence in the Central Division for modest but meaningful reductions across a wide range of crimes that can be attributed to the Main Street Project and the SCI. The analysis does not have the “gold standard” internal validity of a randomized experiment, but our nonequivalent, no-treatment control group time series design has real merit, and we can find no alternative explanations for our main findings. It also helps that there is unequivocal evidence that the Skid Row homeless encampment was completely cleared. A key intervening requirement for crime reduction was demonstrably fulfilled.

The evidence for beneficial spillover effects in the comparison divisions is less compelling. The estimated effects are roughly comparable, but in contrast to the interventions in the Central Division, we have no data whatsoever on what the police may have done. We can only speculate on what may have happened. Although our post hoc account has some plausibility, it is no substitute for real measures of police practices in the comparison divisions and of responses of the homeless across the entire Central Bureau to interventions in Central Division.

At the same time, the usefulness of our study depends on the knowledge base from which the Main Street Project and the SCI were implemented. The scientific gold standard is not the only yardstick. Another yardstick is the evidence about any treatment effects that would otherwise be available. By that measure, our findings are certainly not definitive but still are a step forward.

Still, there are some strong caveats to keep in mind. The modest crime reductions imply that much of the crime, perhaps even most crime, in the Central Division was not driven by the Skid Row homeless encampment. If the goal is crime reduction overall, dispersing the homeless is, at best, a start. In addition, whether the findings can be usefully generalized to other cities with their own kinds of homeless problems is an empirical question. For example, the interventions in the Central Division were premised on large homeless encampments thought to be a key factor in local crime. Finally, there is the matter of cost effectiveness. Even if one only considers the costs of the intervention, the arrests, the prosecutions, and the incarcerations, it is not apparent that clearing the Skid Row homeless encampment was a good use of police resources. It may have been, but that case remains to be made in real economic terms.

Crime reduction is no doubt an important policy goal. The high victimization rates for homeless individuals imply that the Main Street Project and the SCI probably had some direct benefits for the people formerly living on Skid Row streets. There were also the benefits for local shopkeepers, their customers, and residents in dwellings nearby. We emphasize again, however, that police interventions of the sort undertaken by the Main Street Project and the SCI do not solve the problem of homelessness. At best, they can only address one of its possible manifestations.



## References

- Berk, Richard A. 2008. *Statistical Learning from a Regression Perspective*. New York: Springer.
- Berk, Richard A., Lawrence Brown, and Linda Zhao. 2009. Statistical inference after model selection. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 26: 217–236.
- Berk, Richard A., Brian Kriegler, and Donald Ylvisaker. 2008. Counting the homeless in Los Angeles County. In (Deborah Nolan and Terry Speed, eds.), *Probability and Statistics: Essays in Honor of David A. Freedman*. Monograph Series for the Institute of Mathematical Statistics. Beachwood, OH: Institute of Mathematical Statistics.
- Berk, Richard A. and John M. MacDonald. 2009. The dynamics of crime regimes. *Criminology*, 47: 971–100.
- Blasi, Gary. 2007. *Policing Our Way out of Homelessness? The First Year of the Safer Cities Initiative on Skid Row*. Los Angeles: The UCLA School of Law Fact Investigation Clinic.
- Braga, Anthony A. 2001. The effects of hot spots policing on crime. *Annals of the American Academy*, 578: 104–125.
- Braga, Anthony A. and David Weisburd. 2010. Editor's introduction: Empirical evidence on the relevance of place in criminology. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 26: 1–6.
- Braga, Anthony A. and Brenda J. Bond. 2008. Policing crime and disorder hot spots: A randomized controlled trial. *Criminology*, 46: 577–608.
- Brantingham, Patricia L. and Paul J. Brantingham. 1999. A theoretical model of crime hot spot generation. *Studies on Crime and Crime Prevention*, 8: 7–26.
- Bratton, William (with Peter Knobler). 1998. *Turnaround: How America's Top Cop Reversed the Crime Epidemic*. New York: Random House.
- Bratton, William and George L. Kelling. 2006. There are no cracks in the broken windows. *National Review*, February 28.
- Eck, John E. and William Spelman. 1987. *Problem Solving: Problem-Oriented Policing in Newport News*. Washington, DC: Police Executive Research Forum.
- Felson, Marcus. 2002. *Crime and Everyday Life*, 3rd Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Freedman, David A. 2005. *Statistical Models: Theory and Practice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Goldstein, Herman. 1990. *Problem-Oriented Policing*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Green, Peter J. and Bernard W. Silverman. 1994. *Nonparametric Regression and Generalized Linear Models*. New York: Chapman & Hall.
- Harcourt, Bernard E. 2005. Policing L.A.'s Skid Row: Crime and real estate development in downtown Los Angeles (an experiment in real time). *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 325.
- Harcourt, Bernard E. and Jens Ludwig. 2006. Broken windows: New evidence from New York City and a five-city experiment. *University of Chicago Law Review*, 73: 271–320.
- Hastie, Trevor J. and Rob J. Tibshirani. 1990. *Generalized Additive Models*. New York: Chapman & Hall.

- Hastie, Trevor J., Rob J. Tibshirani, and Jerome Friedman. 2009. *The Elements of Statistical Learning*, 2nd Edition. New York: Springer.
- Kelling, George L. and William Bratton. 1998. Declining crime rates: Insiders views of the New York City story. *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 89: 775–836.
- Koegel, Paul, Audrey Burnam, and Rodger K. Farr. 1988. The prevalence of specific psychiatric disorders among homeless individuals in the inner-city of Los Angeles. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 45: 1085–1092.
- Kushel, Margot B., Jennifer L. Evans, Sharon Perry, Marjorie J. Robertson, and Andrew R. Moss. 2003. No door to lock: Victimization among homeless and marginally housed persons. *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 163: 2492–2499.
- Leeb, Hannes and Benedikt M. Pötscher. 2005. Model selection and inference: Facts and fiction. *Econometric Theory*, 21: 21–59.
- Leeb, Hannes and Benedikt M. Pötscher. 2006. Can one estimate the conditional distribution of post-model-selection estimators? *The Annals of Statistics*, 34: 2554–2591.
- Leeb, Hannes and Benedikt M. Pötscher. 2008. Model selection. In (Torben G. Anderson, Richard A. Davis, Jens-Peter Kreib, and Thomas Mikosch, eds.), *The Handbook of Financial Time Series*. New York: Springer.
- Lopez, Steven. 2005. Demons are winning on Skid Row. *Los Angeles Times*, October 16. Retrieved June 2, 2010 from [articles.latimes.com/2005/oct/16/local/me-lopez16](http://articles.latimes.com/2005/oct/16/local/me-lopez16).
- Full coverage: Homeless in America. Complete L.A. Times coverage on the issue of homelessness, the current reality and possible solutions. 2009. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved June 18, 2009 from [latimes.com/la-homeless-pkg,0,5295266.special](http://latimes.com/la-homeless-pkg,0,5295266.special).
- Los Angeles Almanac. 2009. Retrieved August 18, 2009 from [laalmanac.com/social/so14.htm](http://laalmanac.com/social/so14.htm).
- Los Angeles Police Department. 2008a. *Presentation at the Manhattan Institute/Milken Institute Policing Skid Row Conference*. Los Angeles, CA. Retrieved June 18, 2009 from [lapdonline.org](http://lapdonline.org) (3735).
- Los Angeles Police Department. 2008b. News release (38591). Retrieved June 18, 2009 from [lapdonline.org](http://lapdonline.org).
- Mangano, Peter F. and Gary Blasi. 2007. Stuck on Skid Row. *Los Angeles Times*, October 29: Opinion Section. Retrieved June 18, 2009 from [articles.latimes.com/2007/oct/29/news/oemangano29](http://articles.latimes.com/2007/oct/29/news/oemangano29).
- McMorris, Emily N. 2006. *Jones v. City of Los Angeles*: A dangerous expansion of Eighth Amendment protections stifles efforts to clean up Skid Row. *Loyola of Los Angeles Law Review*, 40: 1149–1168.
- Miethe, Terry D. and Robert F. Meier. 1990. Opportunity, choice, and criminal victimization: A test of a theoretical model. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 27: 243–266.
- National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty. 2009. *Homes not Handcuffs: The Criminalization of Homelessness in U.S. Cities*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Rossi, Peter H. 1989. *Down and out in America: The Origins of Homelessness*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

- Sampson, Robert J. 1995. The community. In (James Q. Wilson and Joan Petersilia, eds.), *Crime*. San Francisco, CA: Institute for Contemporary Studies.
- Sampson, Robert J. and Janet L. Lauritsen. 1990. Deviant lifestyles, proximity to crime, and the offender–victim link in personal violence. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 27: 110–139.
- Shadish, William R., Thomas D. Cook, and Donald T. Campbell. 2002. *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Generalized Causal Inference*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Sherman, Lawrence W., Patrick R. Gartin, and Michael E. Buerger. 1989. Hot spots of predatory crime: Routine activities and the criminology of place. *Criminology*, 27: 27–55.
- Sherman, Lawrence W. 1990. Police crackdowns: Initial and residual deterrence. In (Michael H. Tonry and Norval Morris, eds.), *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, Vol. 12. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Skogan, Wesley G. 1990. *Disorder and Decline: Crime and the Spiral of Decay in American Neighborhoods*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Taylor, Ralph B. 2001. *Breaking Away from Broken Windows: Baltimore Neighborhoods and the Nationwide Fight against Crime, Grime, Fear, and Decline*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Weisburd, David and John Eck. 2004. What can police do to reduce crime, disorder, and fear? *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 593: 42–65.
- Weisburd, David, Laura A. Wyckoff, Justin Ready, John E. Eck, Joshua C. Hinkle, and Frank Gajewski. 2006. Does crime just move around the corner? A controlled study of spatial displacement and diffusion of crime control benefits. *Criminology*, 44: 549–592.
- Weisburd, David, Gerben J.N. Bruinsma, and Wim Bernasco. 2009. Units of analysis in geographic criminology: Historical development, critical issues, and open questions. In (David Weisburd, Gerben J.N. Bruinsma, and Wim Bernasco, eds.), *Putting Crime in Its Place*. New York: Springer.
- Wenzel, Susan L., Paul Koegel, and Lillian Gelberg. 2000. Antecedents of physical and sexual victimization among homeless women: A comparison to homeless men. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 28: 367–390.
- Welsh, Brandon C. and Akemi Hoshi. 2002. Communities and crime prevention In (Lawrence W. Sherman, David P. Farrington, Brandon C. Welsh, and Doris Layton MacKenzie, eds.), *Evidence-Based Crime Prevention*. New York: Routledge.
- Wilson, James Q. and George L. Kelling. 1982. Broken windows: The police and neighborhood safety. *Atlantic Monthly*, March: 29–38.
- Wood, Simon N. 2008. Fast stable direct fitting and smoothness selection for generalized additive models. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Series B*, 70: 495–518.

**Court Cases**

*Jones v. City of Los Angeles*, 444 F.3d 1118, 1120 (9th Cir. 2006).

**Richard Berk** is a professor in the departments of statistics and criminology at the University of Pennsylvania. He was previously a distinguished professor of statistics at UCLA. Berk is an elected fellow of the American Statistical Association, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the Academy of Experimental Criminology. His current research interests include statistical learning procedures and applied statistics more generally. He has published extensively on program evaluation, criminal justice, environmental issues, and applied statistics. Berk's two most recent books are *Regression Analysis: A Constructive Critique* (Sage Publications, 2003) and *Statistical Learning from a Regression Perspective* (Springer Series in Statistics, 2008).

**John MacDonald** is an associate professor of criminology at the University of Pennsylvania. His research interests include studying social policy effects on crime and violence among individuals and urban communities and racial disparities in criminal justice. He has published in a number of peer-reviewed journals such as *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, *American Journal of Public Health*, *Criminology*, *Crime & Delinquency*, *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, *Journal Research in Crime and Delinquency*, and *Urban Studies*, among others.

## POLICY ESSAY

### REDUCING HOMELESS-RELATED CRIME

## Policy essay on “Policing the homeless...”

**Alex R. Piquero**

*Florida State University*

In the fall of 2005, the City of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) pilot tested a place-based enforcement effort—the Main Street Project—to deal with homelessness in a downtown section known as Skid Row through the use of fines and citations. After anecdotal evidence of its success, the LAPD instituted a large-scale version—the Safer Cities Initiative (SCI)—in September 2006, which placed 50 full-time officers on the street in downtown Los Angeles who were charged with breaking up homeless encampments, issuing citations, and making arrests. After clearing out specific areas, the officers maintained their presence for 7 days and then moved to other parts of downtown. The LAPD’s intervention was limited to the Central Police Division, which is located in downtown Los Angeles close to Dodger Stadium, the Staples Center, and the Los Angeles Convention Center, whereas four other adjacent divisions (Northeast, Rampart, Hollenbeck, and Newton) formed the comparison sites that received no official police intervention.

The findings showed that (a) the intervention was associated with reductions in nuisance, property, and violent crimes; (b) there was no evidence that crime was displaced to (and thus increased in) the other four police divisions; and (c) there was some spillover effect such that comparable reductions for all three crimes were observed in the nonexperimental divisions adjacent to the Central Division, which had no apparent concerted police effort. In all, the results of this carefully executed study demonstrate once again that it is *what* the police do that matters in targeting places for crime treatment and eventual crime reduction (Sherman, 1995).

### **What Did We Learn from the LAPD Program and the Science?**

A growing body of experimental and quasi-experimental research indicates that the police can have small but significant deterrent effects on crime and disorder and that these effects do not necessarily decay over time—especially if booster shots (as SCI likely was for the Main Street Project) are administered (Braga and Bond, 2008; Mazerolle, Ready, Terrill, and Waring, 2000; Sherman and Weisburd, 1995). This knowledge base has emerged from policy efforts in a

---

Direct correspondence to Alex R. Piquero, College of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Florida State University, 634 W. Call Street, Hecht House, Tallahassee, FL 32306-1127 (e-mail: [apiquero@fsu.edu](mailto:apiquero@fsu.edu)).

variety of city, county, and state police departments; has focused on a vast array of crime and disorder issues; and when taken together, should finally put to rest the often mistaken view that the police have no effect on crime whatsoever (Weisburd and Eck, 2004). The study by Berk and MacDonald (2010, this issue) can now be added to this larger body of research insofar as it extends this police effect to the issue of homelessness, as well as to the crime and disorder consequences that follow from it.

From the science, we are reminded once again about the care and consideration needed to conduct a scientifically rigorous, intervention-based analysis. As readers know, it is tempting to attribute cause and effect in these circumstances, but Berk and MacDonald (2010) have been careful to allude to cause without saying the LAPD initiative absolutely caused the crime decrease. Their combined analyses tell an elegant story about the LAPD initiative, and one would be hard pressed to find other sources of variation that could have produced the various sets of findings uncovered in their evaluation. Furthermore, the analyses have provided criminologists with an alternative and useful approach to performing a time-series intervention analysis. We learned how small-detailed decisions (i.e., when to begin the intervention point in the analysis) can yield different findings. For example, Berk and MacDonald indicate that moving the start date of the Main Street intervention 6 weeks forward virtually removes any nuisance crime treatment effect for either of the two interventions. We also learned how to probe for and identify any displacement and spillover effects, and we learned how a simple line graph is sometimes more telling than a set of regression estimates (cf. Maltz, 1994). In sum, studies like these are few and far between, and they serve as good exemplars for scholars and students alike.

### **But Where Did the Crime Go?**

Of course, as with any careful scientific study, several questions emerge from Berk and MacDonald's (2010) study of the policing-the-homeless evaluation that remain in need of attention and consideration. Within the context of the LAPD initiative, several opportunities for theoretical and empirical unpacking are highlighted.

First, as with any time-series intervention study, although we can conclude that the intervention was associated with a change in the outcome of interest, it is difficult to determine precisely what caused the association. To be sure, this does not deny the real distinct possibility, in the current instance, of a true intervention effect. Nevertheless, ruling out as many rival causal factors as possible still does not pinpoint the specific underlying theoretical causal mechanisms that could have produced the association between the LAPD intervention and the decrease in crime (cf. Piquero, 2005), which of course raises several potential possibilities.

It is the case that, in general, the City of Los Angeles arrest rates had been trending downward for some time. Figure 1 shows these trends for the five police divisions that comprise the Central Bureau for the period 2004–2008. Here, a story can be told that the LAPD intervention effect may have capitalized on the crime spike evident in the Central Area District just prior to the initial police intervention. It is also worth noting that although arrest rates have

decreased in the Central Area over time, the four adjacent areas experienced increases in arrest rates between 2007 and 2008.<sup>1</sup>

Building on this point, consider Figure 7 in Berk and MacDonald's (2010) analysis. If one were to take a pen and place it right on top of the crime counts that appear just prior to the pilot program (the immediate left of the first vertical line) and then look at the overall (declining) trend over time without that high point showing, it seems that the crime counts were already declining and that the short-term effect is capitalizing on the crime spike that occurred just prior to the intervention. This observation raises the question as to what the crime problem was like in the area before the Main Street and SCI interventions were implemented. Of course, all this attention on the police side of the justice system operation does not rule out another possibility in that the intervention could have increased the number of (homeless) individuals who were picked up for various offenses, removed from the street, and subsequently jailed (as shown in Figure 2).

Another potential explanation for the disappearance of crime considers the possibility that the homeless population in Los Angeles changed over time. Although it is difficult to provide a true estimate of the homeless population, data from the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), which is an agency that provides estimates of the homeless population for the city every 2 years, point to a steady decline. Figure 3 presents the frequency count for the homeless population for the Los Angeles Continuum of Care Area, the City of Los Angeles, and the Skid Row area for the periods 2005, 2007, and 2009 (LAHSA, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2009a, 2009b). As can be observed, a sizable decrease occurred in the homeless population in the city from 48,103 in 2005 to 24,915 in 2009, which represents a decrease of 48%. This finding is buttressed against the Skid Row estimates, which increased between 2005 (3,668) and 2007 (5,131) only to decrease to 3,802 in 2009.<sup>2</sup> What is most interesting about the Skid Row homeless population estimates is that the reduction in crime associated with the SCI, which began in September 2006, occurred right before the homeless population was at its highest point (2007) compared with the year before and the year after the police effort was implemented.

### Could Offenders Have Changed?

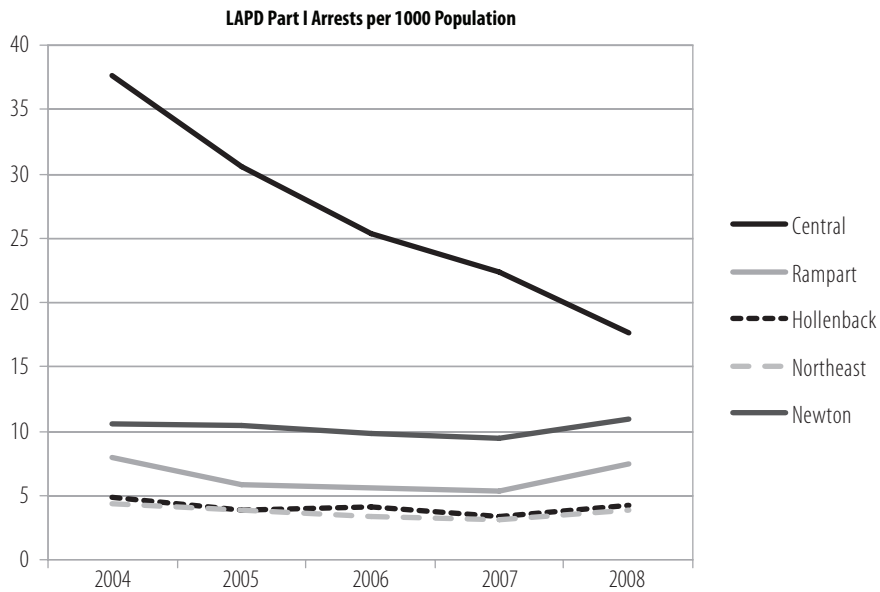
These explanations notwithstanding, crime is committed by individuals against property or persons and, thus, entails consideration of other explanations for the crime decrease observed in Berk and MacDonald's (2010) evaluation. A specific theoretical framework that is especially useful in the context of policing is deterrence. As readers know, deterrence is based on the no-

1. The data described in Figure 1 use the arrest rate per 1,000 population, whereas the outcome variable in Berk and McDonald's (2010) study uses crime counts unadjusted for population.
2. These declines in the homeless population could have been caused by many factors, including the increase in service providers operating emergency and transitional housing in the areas—especially in the Skid Row section (LAHSA, 2009b: 1) as well as LA County's \$100 million Homeless Prevention Initiative and the city's push for permanent supportive housing (DiMassa, 2009). Drawing a corollary to the reentry correctional system and efforts that assist offenders in transitioning back into the community, these programs provide services for homeless individuals in an effort to help their transition.

tion that compliance with the law is secured by both threatened and exerted punishment for criminal activity. The imposition of punishment is visited on those who have committed offenses in order to keep them from committing crimes in the future (specific deterrence); the threat of punishment is visited on those who have not yet but might commit crimes were it not for the fact that they could be punished if they were to do it (general deterrence). Effective punishments are those that are certain, carried out swiftly, and delivered with just enough severity to outweigh the benefits derived from offending. Although the evidence on deterrence in general is mixed (Pratt et al., 2005), the evidence of a certainty effect is strong (Nagin, 1998).

**FIGURE 1**

**LAPD Part I Arrests per 1,000 Population**

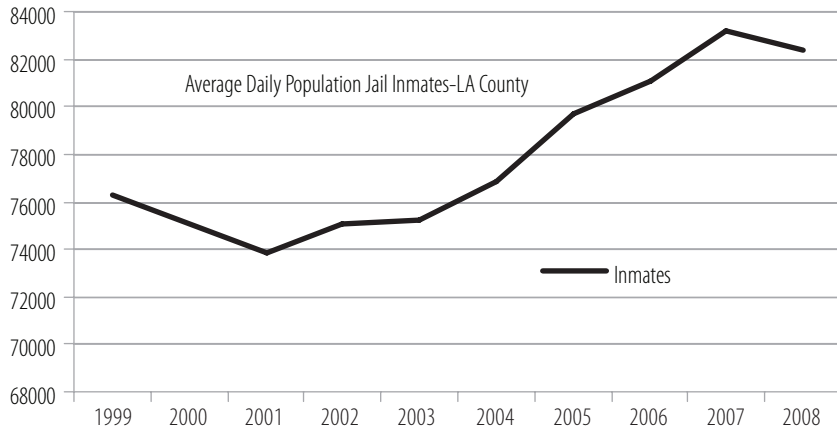


Source: LAPD Statistical Digest: Information Technology Division Management Report Unit. Retrieved April 21, 2010 from [lapdonline.org/crime\\_maps\\_and\\_compstat/content\\_basic\\_view/9098](http://lapdonline.org/crime_maps_and_compstat/content_basic_view/9098).



**FIGURE 2**

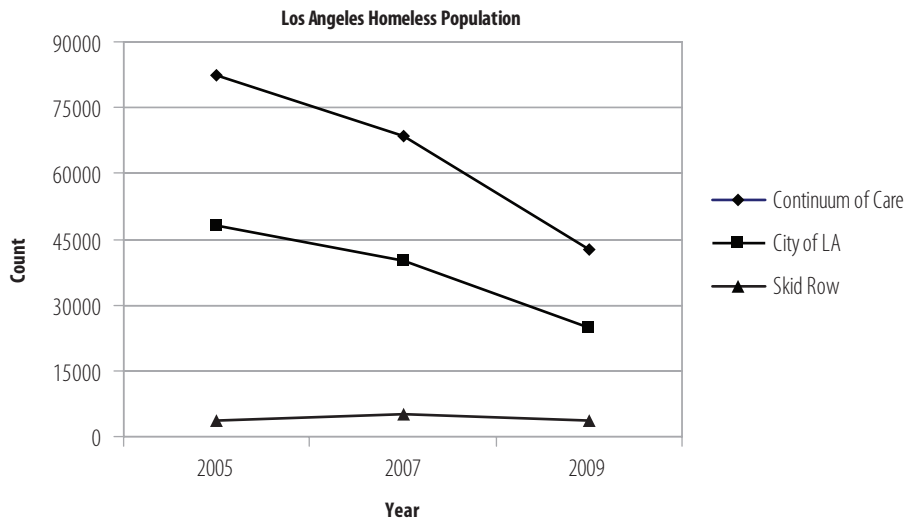
**Average Daily Population of Jail Inmates—LA County**



Source: California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation 2009 Report, 1st Quarter. Retrieved April 21, 2010 from [cdcr.ca.gov/Divisions\\_Boards/CSA/FSO/Surveys/Jail\\_Profile/Jail\\_Profile\\_Survey.html](http://cdcr.ca.gov/Divisions_Boards/CSA/FSO/Surveys/Jail_Profile/Jail_Profile_Survey.html).

**FIGURE 3**

**Los Angeles, California Homeless Population**



Source: Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (2005, 2007, 2009).

Consideration of deterrence involves how individuals perceive and interpret formal (and informal) sanction threats. This process suggests several potential explanations that could have helped produce, in part, the crime reduction observed in the Skid Row section of downtown Los Angeles. For example, did individuals alter their perceptions of the risks of offending and then stop committing crime (specific deterrence)? Did would-be offenders see the increased police presence, watch their colleagues get arrested, and consequently reconsider their own decision to offend (general deterrence)? Did the cleaning of Skid Row streets and subsequent officer rotation make would-be offenders guess where the police would be and where they would go to next (cf. Koper, 1995)? On these points, research has shown that sampled individuals in the general (Nagin, 1998; Pogarsky, Piquero, and Paternoster, 2004) and offender (Loughran, Piquero, Fagan, and Mulvey, 2010) populations update their sanction risk estimates when provided with new information. Perhaps the LAPD policing homeless program served to produce such a change in sanction risk, which was then followed by a change in offending behavior. Although not investigated in the evaluation by Berk and MacDonald (2010), deterrence and rational choice explanations of crime might offer some insight into the decision-making patterns of offenders that might have been altered as a result of the police initiative.

An additional issue worth pursuing is the manner in which the police carried out this intervention. In some instances, severe crackdowns and enforcement efforts targeted at certain individuals have been met with scorn and disdain by some (affected) individuals (Weitzer and Tuch, 2006). The extent to which the LAPD justly and fairly carried out its tasks is an important point to consider (Sherman, 2002), especially in light of research showing that legitimate and procedurally just interactions with justice officials is an important precursor to compliance with the law generally (Tyler, 1990; Fagan and Piquero, 2007), and with the police in particular (Skogan and Frydl, 2004).

### **What Next?**

Police enforcement is one way of dealing with the crime and disorder problem, and the subsequent development and implementation of successful police and public-health partnerships is encouraged (DeBeck, Wood, Zhang, Tyndall, Montaner, and Kerr, 2008). Given the encouraging results from the Main Street and SCI evaluations, the LAPD initiative certainly seems worth considering for expansion and replication to other areas of Los Angeles, such as the public park by the Santa Monica Pier and in other jurisdictions with similar problems. Thus, to the developing list of “what works” in policing crime and disorder, we can now add the LAPD initiative as it applies to homelessness. This item seems to be simple, straightforward, and actionable.

Yet—and not meant to take anything away from the LAPD or the evaluation of the homeless initiative carried out by Berk and MacDonald (2010)—it would be fruitful to bear in mind the intellectual debt that we criminologists owe to Cesare Beccaria, who noted in 1764 that “[i]t is better to prevent crimes than to punish them” (1995 [1764]: 103). Thus, while continuing to empower and support the police’s function of dealing with the consequences of homelessness from an enforcement perspective, we should reinvigorate efforts and devote resources

toward dealing with the underlying problem of homelessness and preventing its expansion. On this point, several cities and states have targeted explicitly the reduction or prevention of homelessness with temporary housing, jobs, and related social (welfare) services that seek to connect individuals and households to community-based services, thereby relying less on police intervention (for a review of homelessness prevention programs, see National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2009).

Thus, aside from the policy efforts that local, state, and federal governments make with respect to creating housing opportunities and transitioning programs that aid in the movement away from homelessness, our job as social scientists is to study carefully the causes and correlates of the phenomenon of interest. Only after identifying and describing the sources and consequences of homelessness can effective programs be designed and implemented at full scale. Unfortunately, much like the field's general lack of research on terrorism—until recently, criminologists have not devoted sustained effort to the homelessness issue. Still, some important theorizing and data collection and analysis by Barak and Bohm (1989), Hagan and McCarthy (1998), Baron (2004), and others has helped to shed important light on a difficult to study—but important—population of street-living individuals who are both offenders and victims. Performing this kind of careful research will help us deal with the part of the process (i.e., the underlying causes of homelessness) that the police have little control over.

Using the criminal career paradigm as a framework (Piquero, Farrington, and Blumstein, 2003), criminologists can begin this arduous task by asking three initial questions: Why do individuals become homeless, why do some individuals continue to be homeless, and why do some individuals stop being homeless? Studying these basic questions is what criminologists are best equipped to do, and only through the generation of this information can we then design effective, non-enforcement-based strategies that can help turn the tide against this terrible human problem.

## References

- Barak, Gregg and Robert H. Bohm. 1989. The crimes of the homeless or the crime of homelessness. *Contemporary Crises*, 13: 275–278.
- Baron, Stephen W. 2004. General strain, street youth, and crime: Testing Agnew's revised theory. *Criminology*, 42: 457–483.
- Beccaria, Cesare. 1995 [1764]. *On Crimes and Punishments, and Other Writings*. Edited by Richard Bellamy, translated by Richard Davies and Virginia Cox. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- Berk, Richard and John MacDonald. 2010. Policing the homeless: An evaluation of efforts to reduce homeless-related crime. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Braga, Anthony J. and Brenda J. Bond. 2008. Policing crime and disorder hot spots: A randomized controlled trial. *Criminology*, 46: 577–608.

- DeBeck, Kora, Evan Wood, Ruth Zhang, Mark Tyndall, Julio Montaner, and Thomas Kerr. 2008. Police and public health partnerships: Evidence from the evaluation of Vancouver's supervised injection facility. *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy*, 3: 11.
- DiMassa, Cara Mia. 2009. Los Angeles County's homeless population down by 38%. *Los Angeles Times*, October 29. Retrieved April 21, 2010 from [articles.latimes.com/2009/oct/29/local/me-homeless29](http://articles.latimes.com/2009/oct/29/local/me-homeless29).
- Fagan, Jeffrey and Alex R. Piquero. 2007. Rational Choice and Developmental Influences on recidivism among Adolescent Felony Offenders. *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies*, 4: 715-748.
- Hagan, John and Bill McCarthy. 1998. *Mean Streets: Youth Crime and Homelessness*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- Koper, Christopher S. 1995. Just enough police presence: Reducing crime and disorderly behavior by optimizing patrol time in crime hot spots. *Justice Quarterly*, 12: 649-672.
- Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority. 2005. *2005 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count*. Retrieved April 21, 2010 from [lahsa.org/docs/homelesscount/LAHSAReport%20Final%20Version6-4.pdf](http://lahsa.org/docs/homelesscount/LAHSAReport%20Final%20Version6-4.pdf).
- Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority. 2007a. *2007 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count*. Retrieved April 21, 2010 from [lahsa.org/docs/homelesscount/2007/LAHSAReport.pdf](http://lahsa.org/docs/homelesscount/2007/LAHSAReport.pdf).
- Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority. 2007b. *Skid Row Homeless Counts: Comparison of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and the Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority (LAHSA) Homeless Enumerations*. Retrieved April 21, 2010 from [lahsa.org/docs/homelesscount/2007/Skid%20Row%20Homeless%20Count.pdf](http://lahsa.org/docs/homelesscount/2007/Skid%20Row%20Homeless%20Count.pdf).
- Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority. 2009a. *2009 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count*. Retrieved April 21, 2010 from [lahsa.org/docs/H09/Homeless-Count-2009-Report.pdf](http://lahsa.org/docs/H09/Homeless-Count-2009-Report.pdf).
- Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority. 2009b. *2009 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count Report, City of Los Angeles Skid Row*. Retrieved April 21, 2010 from [lahsa.org/docs/H09/SKID\\_ROW\\_Jan13\\_10.pdf](http://lahsa.org/docs/H09/SKID_ROW_Jan13_10.pdf).
- Loughran, Thomas, Alex R. Piquero, Jeffrey Fagan, and Edward P. Mulvey. 2010. Differential deterrence: Studying heterogeneity and changes in perceptual deterrence among serious youthful offenders. *Crime & Delinquency*. In press.
- Maltz, Michael D. 1994. Deviating from the mean: The declining significance of significance. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 31: 434-463.
- Mazerolle, Lorraine, Justin Ready, William Terrill, and Elin Waring. 2000. Problem-oriented policing in public housing: The Jersey City evaluation. *Justice Quarterly*, 17: 129-158.
- Nagin, Daniel S. 1998. Criminal deterrence research at the outset of the twenty-first century. In (Michael H. Tonry, ed.), *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, Vol. 23. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. 2009. *An Ounce of Prevention: Programs to Prevent Homelessness in 25 States*. Washington, DC: National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty.

- Piquero, Alex R. 2005. Reliable information and rational policy decisions: Does gun research fit the bill? *Criminology & Public Policy*, 4: 779–798.
- Piquero, Alex R., David P. Farrington, and Alfred Blumstein. 2003. The criminal career paradigm. In (Michael H. Tonry, ed.), *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, Vol. 30. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Pogarsky, Greg, Alex R. Piquero, and Raymond Paternoster. 2004. Modeling change in perceptions about sanction threats: The neglected linkage in deterrence theory. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 20: 343–369.
- Pratt, Travis C., Francis T. Cullen, Kristie R. Blevins, Leah E. Daigle, and Tamara D. Madensen. 2005. The Empirical Status of Deterrence Theory: A Meta-Analysis. In (Francis T. Cullen, John Paul Wright, Kristie Blevins, eds.) *Taking Stock: The status of the Criminological Theory*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- Sherman, Lawrence W. 1995. The police. In (James Q. Wilson and Joan Petersilia, eds.), *Crime*. San Francisco, CA: Institute for Contemporary Studies Press.
- Sherman, Lawrence W. 2002. Fair and effective policing. In (James Q. Wilson and Joan Petersilia, eds.), *Crime: Public Policies for Crime Control*, 2nd edition. Oakland, CA: Institute for Contemporary Studies Press.
- Sherman, Lawrence W. and David Weisburd. 1995. General deterrent effects of police patrol in crime hot spots: A randomized controlled trial. *Justice Quarterly*, 12: 625–648.
- Skogan, Wesley G. and Kathleen Frydl (eds.). 2004. *Fairness and Effectiveness in Policing*. Washington, DC: National Research Council.
- Tyler, Tom R. 1990. *Why People Obey the Law*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Weisburd, David and John E. Eck. 2004. What can police do to reduce crime, disorder, and fear? *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 593: 42–65.
- Weitzer, Ronald and Steven A. Tuch. 2006. *Race and Policing in America*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

---

**Alex R. Piquero** is a professor in the College of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Florida State University, co-editor of the *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, and adjunct professor in the Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice, and Governance at Griffith University, Australia. His research interests include criminal careers, criminological theory, and quantitative research methods. He has received several awards for his research, teaching, and service, and he has recently served as Executive Counselor of the American Society of Criminology.



## Tackling homelessness in Los Angeles' Skid Row

### The role of policing strategies and the spatial deconcentration of homelessness

**Dennis P. Culhane**

*University of Pennsylvania*

The policing initiatives in Los Angeles' Skid Row studied by Berk and MacDonald (2010, this issue) are part of a long history of using police to control public spaces and delimit the physical appearance of homelessness in the modern American city. Shop owners, local chambers of commerce, tourism officials, and their advocates in government have long been frustrated by the presence of visibly destitute men and women in commercial areas. These frustrations have led to repeated attempts to criminalize homelessness with ordinances that target panhandling, loitering, and sleeping in public (Foscarinis, Cunningham-Bowers, and Brown, 1999; National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2006). Even more commonly, police have been deployed to clear areas of indigent people by prodding them to "move along" or by loading them in vans for transport to shelters or even to other towns. People who are homeless have also been the target of differential enforcement of various laws as a means of discouraging them from settling in certain areas or for clearing them for special events (e.g., national political conventions, Olympics, etc.). Encampments and other informal squatter settlements have been dismantled regularly on the grounds of enforcing health and safety standards (Guy and Lloyd, 2010; Katz, 2010).

The rationale for the Safer City Initiatives (SCI) in Skid Row went beyond the mere management of physical space and aimed more specifically to reduce *crime* in the downtown district of Los Angeles. As Berk and MacDonald (2010) indicate in their test of its effects, the initiative was intended explicitly to reduce nuisance, property, and violent crimes that were thought to be associated with the spatial concentration of homelessness in Skid Row. The authors report that a "meaningful but modest" reduction occurred in crime in the period subsequent to the

---

Direct correspondence to Dennis P. Culhane, University of Pennsylvania, 3701 Locust Walk, Philadelphia, PA 19104 (e-mail: culhane@upenn.edu).

clearance of encampments and stepped-up enforcement. However, because crime rates remained approximately 60% of their prior levels, they also concluded that most of the crime in the area was not associated with public forms of homelessness *per se*. The area itself may have remained a place that attracts or is home to perpetrators of crime, regardless of the visible presence of people who are homeless. Moreover, as the authors note, because people who are homeless are more likely to be victims of some crimes, especially violent crimes, some of the crime reduction may be attributable to the removal of potential victims, not just perpetrators.

In any case, Berk and MacDonald (2010) conclude rightly that the SCI did not produce results that could support a policing strategy as an effective means to address homelessness. Without adequate alternatives to street homelessness, as in a sufficient supply of supported housing and emergency shelter, any clearance strategy is simply going to disperse people into other areas, where they will remain homeless. (Interestingly, the authors did not find a displacement effect on *crime*—people who were homeless and scattered by the elimination of encampments in Skid Row did not create an increase in crime in adjacent areas. Rather, they found a spillover effect—adjacent areas also saw declines in crime, possibly because of the carryover of stepped-up enforcement in adjacent areas.) As noted by Berk and MacDonald (2010), the SCI intervention was not intended as an intervention to address homelessness, but instead it was developed to fight the crime problems created by the *spatial concentration* of homelessness in encampments and on the streets of Skid Row. The authors report that they could not find any potential confounding explanations for the observed drop in crimes that were linked to the timing of the SCI. However, it is noteworthy that simultaneous interventions were underway in Skid Row sponsored by Los Angeles County, under the umbrella of the “Homelessness Prevention Initiatives,” which included the creation of expanded supported housing capacity, increased housing assistance under the General Relief program, and more aggressive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) enrollment. All of these programs were targeted to people who were chronically homeless in Skid Row. Each of these likely contributed to some declines in homelessness in the area but perhaps not in so distinct a temporal association with the SCI impacts found by the authors.

Regardless, the focus on the deconcentration of visible homelessness and encampments ultimately might prove to be of limited impact, *both* on the spatial concentration of visible homelessness *and* on crime in downtown Los Angeles. First, the intervention seems to be time limited. Police resources cannot be reallocated to this purpose indefinitely. Second, as noted by Berk and MacDonald (2010), the increased police presence may be among the lesser costs of the strategy compared with the costs of related arrests and incarcerations. Thus, it is not clear that the city, which bears the costs of the police, or the county, which pays for the jails, would want to sustain such a strategy. Indeed, a growing body of research—including a study evaluating a housing program targeting chronically homeless persons in Skid Row (Flaming, Matsunaga, and Burns, 2009)—shows that it is cheaper to provide supported housing for many of the chronically homeless than to have them shuttling among hospitals, shelters, and jails (Culhane, Metraux, and Hadley, 2002; Gilmer, Manning, and Ettner, 2009; Larimer et al., 2009; Perlman



and Parvensky, 2006). Third, and perhaps most importantly, the spatial concentration of visible homelessness and encampments in Skid Row is caused largely by a factor left unaddressed by this dispersal strategy. Specifically, people are living in the streets of Skid Row *en masse* because of the spatial concentration there of large shelters, meal programs, and other social services that target people who are homeless. These programs have longstanding ties to the area and are not going away in the near term. Indeed, among the more fundamental long-term issues to consider regarding the concentration of homelessness in downtown Los Angeles is how to disperse the homelessness *facilities* that are a magnet for needy persons and that have created a self-perpetuating and unrivaled social services ghetto (at least in the United States).

Of course, dispersing homelessness facilities is no more of a long-term approach to addressing homelessness than is dispersing the homeless themselves. Any attempt to address the problematic concentration of homelessness facilities, as well as the visibility of street homelessness in Los Angeles, must include a larger vision and longer term strategy to address homelessness. Indeed, a collective public and private commitment to break up and disperse the facilities in downtown Los Angeles could create just the impetus that is necessary to force a rethinking of how the region addresses the problem of homelessness more generally. Without such a concomitant approach to rethinking the social service ghetto in Skid Row, it will remain the most potent symbol and institutionalization of homelessness in Los Angeles and, indeed, in the United States.

The ingredients of a more sustainable solution should consider several reforms and initiatives. First, as part of the dismantling of the shelter and social services facilities in Skid Row, a plan should be developed for new, more dispersed facilities that are designed at an appropriate scale so as to fulfill an emergency mission (not a human warehouse or long-term care facility). The facilities should be specialized with regard to the populations they serve (people exiting corrections, substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, and youth) and should be programmed 24 hours a day (not nighttime only) to provide the services and support people need to relocate sustainably with family, friends, in supported housing, or elsewhere in the community. These new shelters should be intentional, targeted, outcome oriented, and time limited, with clear expectations for both providers and clients (none of these are features of the contemporary homeless shelter as commonly understood or practiced).

A major challenge with the dispersal of homeless facilities will be the certain resistance by neighborhood organizations to the establishment of new facilities. As part of the initial proposals for SCI and the Homelessness Prevention Initiative (HPI), five stabilization centers were proposed as alternatives to incarceration for those committing minor crimes and for those discharged from county hospitals, but resistance was so great that none were ever built. Any strategy involving newly dispersed programs would have to rethink the nature and structure of the programs, physical design, security, and location if they are to be built successfully at all.

Second, programs that support people in avoiding shelter entry or that facilitate shelter exit should be expanded greatly. New federal resources through the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program provide for a significant, newly designed model of service provision whereby resources are directed to assist homeless and at-risk households with stabilizing their

housing or with relocating to a new unit (Culhane, Metraux and Byrne, 2010). Consistent with a more outcome-oriented shelter system, this new paradigm places the emphasis on the desired housing solution rather than on simply maintenance of homeless people in homeless facilities. The prevention of homelessness should become a multisectoral and cross-agency responsibility, with social welfare agencies required to identify if their clients are at risk of homelessness and to provide the first line of defense against it. These agencies would include the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, and programs with residential or institutional components, such as correctional agencies, inpatient care programs, detoxification programs, and dependent and delinquent youth services. Each of these agencies should have protocols for assessing the risk for homelessness among their exiting clientele and programs designed to avert shelter placement, even if those interventions are time limited (the primary risk periods for shelter entry are 30 to 60 days after institutional discharge, and most persons are homeless fewer than 60 days).

Third, the new, spatially deconcentrated, and housing solution-oriented homelessness assistance system should be embedded deeper in the traditional community-based health and social services network. Rather than creating insulated homeless programs or service ghettos, as may have been done inadvertently through the federal Continuum of Care policy, homeless assistance programs should be connecting individuals and families to the regular sources of health and social services supports they can access in their communities after their exit from homelessness (and that many were presumably using prior to entering homelessness). Indeed, these service networks need to be part of the solution to homelessness, both in identifying at-risk households who need stabilization supports as well as in assisting with the transition of people back into stable housing.

Fourth, a newly reformed homelessness assistance system will need much closer coordination with mainstream entitlement and income assistance programs. Every person or family who approaches the homelessness assistance system should be screened systematically for benefits to which they may be eligible. These benefits would include TANF, General Relief (GR), and SSI. Special General Relief initiatives that can provide income and housing assistance to people awaiting SSI approval should be expanded, as these costs are fully recoverable from the federal government from the date of application to the date of receipt. Successful GR housing subsidy programs and employment programs should likewise be expanded and coordinated on site with the newly reformed homeless programs. Recent evaluations of these efforts in LA County have found that employment programs are successful in connecting people to jobs, that housing programs successfully avert and end homelessness among GR recipients, and that both programs are cost effective (Culhane and Metraux, 2009; Moreno, Toros, and Stevens, 2009).

Fifth, because the homelessness problem results most fundamentally from a lack of affordable housing, especially for populations with fixed and low incomes, permanent housing subsidy programs must be expanded aggressively. Research on Skid Row has shown that permanent supported housing programs targeted to people who are chronically homeless can yield a net positive cost-offset for county government and other public payers (Flaming, Matsunaga, and

Burns, 2009). Similar approaches for vulnerable families, particularly those who face costly out-of-home placement of children, should be established, and targeted to this subset of homeless families and to other vulnerable families on fixed disability incomes. Broader housing affordability strategies can also help to alleviate some pressure on emergency assistance programs by reducing the number of households with acute housing needs. These strategies could include set-aside programs that require developers to allocate a proportion of new units at affordable rents, designating tax credits for affordable housing projects that target persons who are homeless or of very low income, and expansions in state and federal rental subsidy programs.

Sixth, any effort to address homelessness effectively must consider the perspectives of people who are homeless in the design of various solutions. The single adult homeless population is aging and is not the same as it was only 15 years ago. Wagner's (1993) ethnography of homelessness made a point of the "resistant" posture of the population at that time, a posture that may be changing as the population ages, and based on more recent ethnographic work (M.H. Moreno, personal communication, May 13, 2010). In any case, input from people who are homeless will help to shape housing solutions and emergency programs that are responsive, timely, and focused on the results that are sought collectively.

Finally, reform strategies should be evaluated rigorously to provide policy makers with information regarding the effectiveness of programs and opportunities for efficiencies. Generating and sustaining political support for homelessness assistance will depend on showing results and must prove to decision leaders that public resources are being invested prudently. Although not all homelessness assistance programs can show cost neutrality or a positive net benefit-cost ratio, many efforts can show that they have positive spillover effects, especially in terms of quality of life for the residents assisted and the communities in which they live (or from which they have spatially deconcentrated), as well as in the reduced use of expensive emergency services. Research will be critical to document these effects.

## Conclusion

Policing strategies can address the spatial concentration of homeless encampments and, thereby, reduce some crimes associated with this disproportionate concentration. However, dispersing people who are homeless does not solve their homelessness. As Berk and MacDonald (2010) describe, homelessness is a complex problem that cannot be addressed through a policing approach alone. A legitimate and appropriate role for law enforcement is to help indigent people connect to services and even to discourage unhealthful encampments that enable people to avoid engaging with meaningful services and supports. However, critical to the legitimacy of law enforcement's involvement on this issue must be a broader societal commitment to address homelessness more effectively. That includes not only law enforcement but also social service providers who are willing to reenvision their roles (and locations), community organizations that are willing to provide their support, and government funding for the new model, including targeted shelters and expansions in housing subsidies for those who cannot exit homelessness without them. A new and more comprehensive approach to homelessness in Los Angeles is

possible, and perhaps the modest success of the SCI, as well as the noteworthy successes of the county's HPIs in Skid Row, can provide a new impetus for a more fundamental change in Los Angeles.

## References

- Berk, Richard and John MacDonald. 2010. Policing the homeless: An evaluation of efforts to reduce homeless-related crime. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Culhane, Dennis P. and Stephen Mettraux. 2009. *Using Adult Linkages Project Data for Determining Patterns and Costs of Services Use by General Relief Recipients in Los Angeles County*. Los Angeles, CA: County of Los Angeles, Chief Executive Office.
- Culhane, Dennis P., Stephen Mettraux and Thomas Byrne. 2010. A prevention-centered approach to homelessness assistance: A paradigm shift? *Housing Policy Debate*, 20 (4).
- Culhane, Dennis P., Stephen Mettraux, and Trevor Hadley. 2002. Public service reductions associated with placement of homeless persons with severe mental illness in supportive housing. *Housing Policy Debate*, 13: 107–163.
- Flaming, Daniel, Michael Matsunaga, and Patrick Burns. 2009. *Where We Sleep: The Costs of Housing and Homelessness in Los Angeles*. Los Angeles, CA: Economic Roundtable.
- Foscarinis, Maria, Kelly Cunningham-Bowers, and Kristen E. Brown. 1999. Out of sight—out of mind: The continuing trend toward the criminalization of homelessness. *Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law & Policy*, 6: 145–164.
- Gilmer, Todd P., Willard G. Manning, and Susan L. Ettner. 2009. A cost analysis of San Diego County's REACH program for homeless persons. *Psychiatric Services*, 60: 445–450.
- Guy, Jim and Paula Lloyd. 2010. Homeless evicted from downtown Fresno camp. *Fresno Bee*, January 28.
- Katz, Matt. 2010. Tent City set to close, but questions remain. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 7, p. B01.
- Larimer, Mary E., Daniek K. Malone, Michelle D. Garner, David C. Atkins, Bonnie Burlingham, Heather S. Lonczak, et al. 2009. Health care and public service use and costs before and after provision of housing for chronically homeless persons with severe alcohol problems. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 301: 1349–1357.
- Moreno, Manuel H., Halil Toros, and Max Stevens. 2009. *The General Relief Housing Subsidy and Case Management Pilot Project: An Evaluation of Participant Outcomes and Cost Savings*. Los Angeles, CA: County of Los Angeles, Chief Executive Office, Service Integration Branch.
- National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty. 2006. *A Dream Denied: The Criminalization of Homelessness in U.S. Cities*. Washington, DC: National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty. Retrieved May 5, 2010 from [nlchp.org/content/pubs/ADreamDenied1-11-06.pdf](http://nlchp.org/content/pubs/ADreamDenied1-11-06.pdf).
- Perlman, Jennifer and John Parvensky. 2006. *Denver Housing First Collaborative Cost Benefit Analysis and Program Outcomes Report*. Denver: Colorado Coalition for the Homeless.

Wagner, David. 1993. *Checkerboard Square: Culture and Resistance in a Homeless Community*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

---

**Dennis P. Culhane** is professor of social policy at the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy and Practice. He is also the Director of Research for the National Center for Homelessness among Veterans at the US Department of Veterans Affairs. He is also working with several states and cities to develop preventative approaches to homelessness, including “rapid exit” and community-based housing stabilization programs.



# POLICY ESSAY

## REDUCING HOMELESS-RELATED CRIME

### Policy is in the details

#### Using external validity to help policy makers

**John E. Eck**

*University of Cincinnati*

**C**riminologists lament that their voices are seldom heard in the rooms of policy. Although all interest groups suffer similar distress, we criminologists do have a point. Much criminal justice policy is what some of my colleagues call “quackery” (Latessa, Cullen, and Gendreau, 2002); it is devoid of not only evidence but also of logic. Some approaches to crime and justice receive little policy support, despite their supporting evidence. And as important, some evidence-based policies are misinterpreted, misapplied, and misused.

Criminologists may not be able to prevent dumb ideas from being applied, and they may have difficulty getting policy makers to adopt evidence-based practices. Still, criminologists do have some ability to reduce the misinterpretation, misapplication, and misuse of their evidence. They can be clear about how policy works. A lack of clarity muddles and obfuscates criminological policy discourse.

Clarity about how a policy works is every bit as important as clarity about statistical methods, research designs, and measures of constructs. Science demands that studies be described in sufficient detail that they can be replicated. A study that cannot be replicated becomes the subject of grave suspicion, as is exemplified by cold fusion (Taubes, 1993). Similarly, criminologists who desire to influence policy must describe the policies they study with sufficient clarity that a policy maker could implement it, should that the policy be desirable, or avoid it if the policy is undesirable. Clarity is less a matter of style than of providing the right information. What is this information? This is the subject of this essay.

I argue that policy relevance is related to the external validity. Not external validity as viewed by Berk and MacDonald (2010, this issue), but as viewed by the people who may consider applying a study’s findings. Criteria for external validity (Shadish, Cook, and Campbell, 2002) provide a useful list of information authors should provide policy makers. I apply these criteria to the study by Berk and MacDonald to illustrate how information about these criteria can aid

---

Direct correspondence to John E. Eck University of Cincinnati, School of Criminal Justice, 600 Dyer Hall Cincinnati, OH 45221-0389 (e-mail: John.eck@uc.edu).

policy makers and why the absence of such information hinders interpretation, application, and use.

### **External Validity and Practical Utility**

What makes a piece of research useful to a criminal justice policy maker? External validity provides a useful way to answer this question. External validity concerns how generalizable a study's findings are to other times, places, and circumstances (Shadish et al., 2002). Researchers pay homage to external validity in principle but less so in practice. The reason is that a single study can do little to address it. Whereas internal validity (i.e., the degree to which the causal conclusions of a study are justified by the research design) is a matter of falsifying alternative explanations of something that occurred in the past, external validity is about providing evidence for some hypothetical future outcome. The best a researcher can do with a single study is to show that there are no obvious insurmountable barriers to success in the future. Nevertheless, from the policy maker's perspective, external validity criteria provide a handy way of assessing the use of a particular study.

Expanding on Cronbach (1982), Shadish et al. (2002) developed five dimensions of external validity: units, treatments, outcomes, settings, and mechanism. Units refer to the cases examined in the research: Will the study's results change if the units are altered? Treatments refer to the operationalization of the intervention: Will the study's results change if the intervention is implemented differently? Outcomes describe how the dependent variable is operationalized: Will the study's results change if these measures are taken differently? Settings describe the context within which the treatment is applied: Will the study's results change when applied in a different jurisdiction by a different agency? Mechanism refers to the process by which the treatment produces the results within the setting: Will the study's results change if the treatment triggers a different process in a new setting? To make this clearer, let us apply these dimensions to Berk and MacDonald's (2010) study.

### **Learning from Policing Homeless**

Berk and MacDonald (2010) provide an excellent case study for examining clarity. Their article is clearly relevant. Homeless encampments are not a trivial problem in U.S. cities. Police, public health, and other public agencies need to grapple with what to do about them (Chamard, 2010). As important, the policy examined seems to be practical—regardless of one's feelings about the desirability of removing homeless encampments, there is no dispute that this can be done.

Berk and MacDonald's (2010) study has a reasonable degree of internal validity. Their evaluation design has eliminated most alternative explanations for the crime reduction after the pilot and full treatments. However, although there is still the possibility of some unknown confounding variable responsible for the crime drops, the uncertainty over program efficacy is probably far less than the maximum threshold tolerable by most policy makers.



### *Units of Homelessness*

To what units should the policy maker apply this policy? The introduction suggests places, but the study was carried out in a police district. “Place” is a theoretical term embedded in routine activity theory. It is a geographical entity far smaller than a police district or neighborhood.

Sherman, Gartin, and Buerger (1989) defined a place as “a fixed physical environment that can be seen completely and simultaneously, at least on its surface, by one’s naked eye” (p. 31). Eck and Weisburd (1995) state, “[p]laces . . . are specific locations with the larger social environment. They can be as small as the area immediately next to an automatic teller machine or as large as a block face, a strip shopping center, or an apartment building. Often places are thought of as addresses, specific types of businesses, or block faces” (p. 3). A homeless encampment is a place. Central Division, in Los Angeles, is a police command area, and it is definitely not a place.

Why is this important? Places have three basic roles in crime. First, from a routine activity theory perspective, they are where offenders physically come into contact with targets (Felson and Boba, 2010). Much can be done to prevent such meetings or to prevent such meetings from turning into crime (Eck, 2002). Second, places can be convergent settings (Felson, 2003), which are meeting places for offenders that facilitate co-offending there or elsewhere. And finally, places can be corrupting spots that generate crime at other locations. For example, a metal scrap recycling yard, by serving as a receiver of stolen metal, helps produce copper theft from other places. In all three roles, places are contact sites—not metaphorical contact, but real physical contact. A homeless encampment can take on any of these three roles. A neighborhood or police district can take on none.

Were the homeless encampments the treatment units or was the division? Central Division was unlikely to have been one large homeless encampment. And it is not likely that encampments were dispersed evenly about the division. Therefore, the police probably did not treat the entire division. They probably treated the camps. In contrast, one could argue that a few moderate-to-large homeless camps may have crime implications for the wider area within which they are embedded. The diffusion of crime from the camps was unlikely to have been uniform throughout the division, however. And it is not likely that encampment connected crimes ended abruptly at the boundaries of the division.

What we have is the possibility that the police treated places, but the evaluation was conducted at an area level. A real place-based design would have been preferable. Treated and untreated encampments could have been observed, and the crime in their buffer areas could have been counted.

The authors are rightfully concerned about the use of law enforcement to deal with problems created by homelessness. But their evaluation design gives the possibly misleading impression that entire neighborhoods need to be treated. Policy makers who take a neighborhood approach may not only increase the monetary costs of their interventions but also are likely to increase the social costs of their actions. Precise place-focused interventions might be able to reduce the unintended negative consequences.

### *Treatment of Homeless Encampments*

We do not know where the police acted. Do we know more about what they did? What does removing a homeless encampment entail? How many encampments were addressed? Complicating matters, Berk and McDonald (2010) also state that other forms of enforcement were used outside the encampments, such as crackdowns on drunkenness, prostitution, and drug use; foot patrols against incivilities; undercover actions against drug dealers; an anti-robbery initiative; and a general increase in police visibility. Were these the active ingredients in the treatment? If so, this intervention is not simply one of removing homeless encampments, and the treatment would have been at the area rather than the place level. In fact, homeless encampment removal may not be the actions that drove down crime; it may be the other enforcement activities that accompanied the removals. If this is true, then using these enforcement tactics and leaving the encampments in place would have been as effective. And removing homeless encampments without using these other enforcement activities would have little or no impact on crime.

The lack of treatment specificity makes it difficult for scrupulous policy makers to determine what they should do. If policy makers simply removes homeless encampments, then they do not know how many to remove or whether this strategy is sufficient. If they implement law enforcement crackdowns, then they do not know whether this will work in the absence of camp removal. And if they do both, then they may be wasting resources and making their operations excessively harsh.

### *Outcomes of Homeless Encampment Treatment*

Combining a heterogeneous set of crimes into broad categories such as violent, property, and disorder helps assure that there are sufficient events for statistical tests. However, it is likely that each category is dominated by a few types—for example, assaults may dominate the violence category, thefts from vehicles and assorted larcenies probably are most of the property offenses, and drug possession or prostitution might be the dominant disorder event.

Not knowing what these dominant categories are puts the policy maker in the position of not knowing precisely what types of crime reduction she is buying. A policy maker considering removing homeless encampments to reduce burglaries, or rapes, or public urination might think again if he knew that the Los Angeles experience does not extend to these offenses.

### *Settings of Homeless Encampment Treatment*

If policy makers adopt the policy described in the research, they will implement it in a setting different from that in which it was tested. Although the researcher cannot know who will implement the policy where, the researcher can describe the setting with sufficient detail that the policy maker can make such a comparison. Because units are embedded in settings, lack of clarity about units will reduce setting specificity. If the unit is the police district, then the setting includes the surrounding districts. If the unit is the homeless encampment place, then the setting is the police district.

The setting matters because we cannot rule out the possibility that the treatment interacts with different settings differently, producing different outcomes. Policy makers seem to understand this intuitively when they state, “Your treatment may have worked in your city, but it is unlikely to work here.” The technical term for this is “context sensitivity.” One of the major reasons for replication is to learn how sensitive an intervention is to context. But to replicate, we have to be clear about both units and setting.

Here are some unknown facts about the district setting (assuming units are encampments) that might influence outcomes: the spatial clustering of encampments, the size distribution of encampments within the district, and the proximity of encampments to crime and disorder hot spots. The treatment may work well against spatially concentrated encampments but poorly when they are spread over a large area (or vice versa). If a few big encampments predominate, then taking these out may be useful, but if the encampments are many and small, then the intervention might be more difficult to implement. If the encampments are close to the sites of crime, then the causal link between encampments and crime is more obvious, so we would expect the treatment to work better than if encampments are a considerable distance from crime hot spots.

The setting also influences how we can interpret claims about displacement and diffusion of benefits. The standard practice for determining whether displacement or diffusion has occurred is to create a buffer around the treatment unit and handle it like a secondary treatment site. A separate control site is selected so that it is unlikely to be contaminated by the treatment. Because the context of a treatment interacts with that treatment, a setting is inappropriate for a control (Guerette and Bowers, 2009). The use of adjacent districts to Central as controls violates this rule. If offenders displaced to peripheral districts from Central, then the surrounding district crime trends would have been influenced by the treatment (by the same logic, diffusion of benefits would also contaminate these pseudo controls). In short, a policy maker cannot assume the displacement and diffusion findings are correct.

### *Mechanisms from Treating Homeless Encampments in Their Setting*

The final clarity issue involves how the treatment brings about the outcome. It is standard in the hard sciences to show that there is a clear path from a manipulation to the outcome and not just a correlation. Thagard (1999), for example, shows that medical scientists ignored random controlled experiments that indicated that bacteria created stomach ulcers, until researchers demonstrated that a species of bacteria of the type that could cause the ulcers could survive and flourish in a human stomach.

What was the mechanism by which homeless encampment closures influenced crime? There are at least four, each with its own relevance to policy makers: victim removal, offender removal, place control, and side effect.

**Victim Removal.** The authors imply that removing the camps removed the possible victims. If the homeless were the primary victims of the crimes and disorders measured, then we would have to assume that they reported their victimizations to the police routinely. Although possible,

there are several arguments against this mechanism: The lack of access to phone and lack of trust in police are the two most obvious arguments. In fact, if the homeless were the victims, then closing encampments might suppressed reporting—reducing crime reporting through homeless advocacy groups and reducing (former) residents' trust in police. If a policy maker is interested in reducing harms to the homeless, then this is a serious concern.

*Offender removal.* If a significant portion of the offenses in Central Division were perpetrated against nonhomeless victims by homeless people living in encampments, then a different mechanism was triggered: the disruption of homeless offending patterns. How, exactly, is unclear. Perhaps these homeless offenders scattered to offend elsewhere. Perhaps, the encampments were convergent settings (Felson, 2003) that allowed offending homeless to meet and coordinate criminal activities. Although we do not know if this were true, this explanation does not have to contend with the crime reporting problem of the first explanation. This mechanism might appeal to policy makers with a disposition toward encampment removal and might be abhorrent to policy makers who oppose such interventions.

*Place control.* Eliminating the camps could be a form of place management (Madensen and Eck, 2008). Eliminating these places would reduce the chances of vulnerable victims meeting willing offenders in an uncontrolled setting. This explanation runs afoul of the same criticism as the victim mechanism, but we cannot rule it out. If this is the mechanism, then a variety of encampment control mechanisms might be possible for policy makers: ranging from closing them entirely and making camping sites untenable to introducing regulatory processes within camps.

*Side effect.* Finally, it is possible that the police activity in Central associated with removing the encampments (but not the removal themselves) disrupted criminal activity by the nonhomeless. This is plausible if the encampments were near crime hotspots (even if the homeless were not involved in the hot spots). If true, then the same or greater crime reduction might have been achieved by focusing on crime hot spots and on prolific offenders and ignoring encampments. And, if true, the elimination encampments in other settings may not get the crime reduction results observed in this study.

### Improving Policy Relevance

This case study illustrates that external validity can provide a useful way to describe policy relevance. We should put this lesson to use. Just as we expect authors to describe their data, designs, and measures in some detail so we can assess internal, construct, and statistical validity (Shadish et al., 2002), we should also expect authors writing on policy to describe the dimensions of external validity. Policy makers may not understand the importance of the statistical methods, research design, or even measurement, but they probably can understand the relevance of units, treatment, outcomes, setting, and mechanism. We should ask the following questions “Has the study described these dimensions in sufficient detail and clarity that a policy maker could faithfully implement this policy?” And if these elements cannot be described with clarity,

then we should ask the following question: “Has the study clearly stated that there is a lack of relevant information about these dimensions?”

I have made the claim that policy relevance goes beyond competent research. Policy relevance is not simply about “what works.” Policy relevance is also about “*what works where, when, and with whom.*” And policy relevance also concerns “*how does it work under different circumstances.*” If criminologists are to be useful, then they must be clear about these basics. And if the circumstances surrounding the study prevent the researchers from providing these basics, then the researchers should be clear about what they do not know. Only then can we claim that we have done our best to prevent our results from being misinterpreted, misapplied, or misused.

## References

- Berk, Richard and John MacDonald. 2010. Policing the homeless: An evaluation of efforts to reduce homeless-related crime. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Chamard, Sharon. 2010. *Homeless Encampments. Problem-Oriented Guides for Police. Problem-Specific Guides Series, no. 56*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.
- Cronbach, Lee Joseph. 1982. *Designing Evaluations of Educational and Social Programs*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Eck, John E. 2002. Preventing crime at places. In (Lawrence W. Sherman, David Farrington, Brandon Welsh, and Doris Layton MacKenzie, eds.), *Evidence-Based Crime Prevention*. New York: Routledge.
- Eck, John E. and David Weisburd. 1995. Crime places in crime theory. In (John E. Eck and David Weisburd, eds.), *Crime and Place*. Crime Prevention Studies, Vol. 4. Monsey, NY: Criminal Justice Press.
- Felson, Marcus. 2003. The process of cooffending. In (Martha J. Smith and Derek B. Cornish, eds.), *Theory for Practice in Situational Crime Prevention*. Crime Prevention Studies, Vol. 16. Monsey, NY: Criminal Justice Press.
- Felson, Marcus and Rachel Boba. 2010. *Crime and Everyday Life*, 4th Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Guerette, Rob T. and Kate J. Bowers. 2009. Assessing the extent of crime displacement and diffusion of benefits: A systematic review of situational crime prevention evaluations. *Criminology*, 47: 1331–1369.
- Latessa, Edward J., Francis T. Cullen, and Paul Gendreau. 2002. Beyond correctional quackery: Professionalism and the possibility of effective treatment. *Federal Probation*, 66: 43–49.
- Madensen, Tamara and John E. Eck. 2008. Violence in bars: Exploring the impact of place manager decision-making. *Crime Prevention & Community Safety*, 10: 111–125.
- Shadish, William R., Thomas D. Cook, and Donald T. Campbell. 2002. *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for General Causal Inference*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Sherman, Lawrence W., Patrick R. Gartin, and Michael E. Buerger. 1989. Hot spots of predatory crime: Routine activities and the criminology of place. *Criminology*, 27: 27–55.

Taubes, Gary. 1993. *Bad Science: The Short Life and Weird Times of Cold Fusion*. New York: Random House.

Thagard, Paul. 1999. *How Scientists Study Diseases*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

---

**John E. Eck** is Professor of Criminal Justice at the University of Cincinnati's School of Criminal Justice. He has written extensively on police reform efforts, particularly Problem-Oriented Policing, and on the prevention of crime at places. He received his bachelors and masters degrees from the University of Michigan, and his doctorate in criminology from the University of Maryland.

## The Safer Cities Initiative and the removal of the homeless

### Reducing crime or promoting gentrification on Los Angeles' Skid Row?

**Alex S. Vitale**

*Brooklyn College*

The Safer Cities Initiative (SCI), with its massive influx of law enforcement resources, undoubtedly was effective in sweeping the streets of the poor and homeless in the Skid Row area of downtown Los Angeles. Tent cities, open-air drug markets, and the constant motion of shopping carts have all been reduced significantly, bringing an improvement in the physical environment and the social quality of life for those remaining—some of them poor. Some reduction in crime seems to have occurred in the area as well—although its exact nature and scope remain somewhat unclear. On this basis alone, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and its boosters at the Manhattan Institute have claimed victory in the ideological battle to prove that the solution to crime and poverty is not more social spending but instead, expanded and more aggressive law enforcement targeting some of the poorest and most vulnerable populations in society (Mac Donald, 2009). What remains to be determined, however, is whether this initiative produced outcomes that are actually worthy of replication in other urban areas around the country. Here, I think the answer is clearly “no,” based on the failure to reduce homelessness and the high costs associated with what are at best minimal crime reductions.

Berk and MacDonald's (2010, this issue) study is restricted to a narrow measure of whether crime reductions in the Central District of Los Angeles, after the two-stage introduction of the SCI, were greater than in surrounding parts of the city. However, even the limited claim that geographically targeted policing of homeless concentrations can bring about statistically meaningful crime reductions demands scrutiny. More importantly, city leaders searching for policy guidance from this study must take into consideration two important questions. The first

---

Direct correspondence to Alex S. Vitale, Department of Sociology, Brooklyn College, 2900 Bedford Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11210 (e-mail: avitale@brooklyn.cuny.edu).

question is whether a massive influx of law enforcement resources is the most cost-effective way of reducing crime and the social problems of homelessness and the poverty associated with it. The second is whether the primary goal of the SCI was really to reduce crime and homelessness or instead to remove a large concentration of poor people forcibly from Skid Row in hopes of encouraging the subsequent gentrification of the area.

### **Crime Reduction**

The methods used by the SCI raise a substantial concern about opportunity costs. The addition of 50 regular officers and dozens of officers from narcotics and other specialized units in a small area (about 50 square blocks) is bound to have some positive effects on crime, but is this really the most cost-effective way to achieve overall crime reductions in the City of Los Angeles? The cost of the 50 officers alone is estimated to be \$6 million a year (Blasi, 2007). Each arrest is estimated by the City of Los Angeles to cost \$4,300, which comes to \$118 million during the life of the program (LACAN, 2009b). This estimate does not include the costs of processing citations or state prison time. By comparison, the combined spending in the Los Angeles County area from municipalities, county, state, and federal sources on homelessness is approximately \$600 million a year (Wolch, Dear, and Blasi et al, 2007: 6). The policy question here is whether approximately \$150–\$200 million dollars worth of law enforcement spending by the City of Los Angeles might have been used better to reduce homelessness through the construction of supportive housing. In fact, this amount might be significantly larger if used to leverage both state and federal funds.

Several weaknesses exist in the design of this research, which uses the entire Central District as its treatment area. The SCI, however, was limited to a 50-square-block zone within the Central District. Blasi and Stuart (2008) showed that much of the crime reduction in the Central District occurred equally inside and outside the Skid Row area, where police resources were not increased. The only difference was a reduction of approximately 50 robberies a year.

In addition, short time-series analyses of crime rates have not proven useful in explaining the broad, sustained national trend of crime reduction. Changes in the number of police, use of incarceration, employment rates, and use of new policing tactics have all failed to explain why crime has fallen so much in almost all the United States and Canada during the last 20 years (Blumstein and Wallman, 2006; Zimring, 2007). Attempting to analyze crime rate changes in one small area over a short period is fraught with potential problems. Although this research uses weekly crime data to isolate the effect of specific interventions, the exact timing of these interventions is hard to identify, especially given that significant fluctuations in crime rates in small areas in short time periods are the norm. Even though efforts were made to filter out some of this “noise” through complex statistical analysis, in general terms, these kinds of studies have not proven heuristic in explaining the broad trend of crime reduction.

One final concern remains in estimating the reliability of this research. One central element of the SCI was to eliminate numerous encampments and reduce public loitering. The result of this initiative, combined with a reduction in low-income housing overall in the area, has been



the displacement of a large part of the population within the Skid Row area. The population of the Skid Row area before the SCI was estimated at 10,000–15,000, including those living on the streets. During the SCI, tens of thousands of citations and arrests occurred, thousands of people ended up in jails or prisons, and thousands were removed from tent cities. The city's annual homelessness count showed a reduction of 10,000 homeless people in the central part of the city, which encompasses, but is larger than Skid Row between 2005 and 2009 (Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, 2005, 2009). These figures suggest that the reductions in crime found in the report, which were based on raw numbers, not rates, may be overstated. The exact amount is difficult to calculate without more reliable population data, but even a 10% reduction in population in the Central District, relative to the surrounding districts, might throw off the statistical significance of the findings.

### **Homelessness Reduction**

The SCI may have succeeded in displacing people from Skid Row, but it has not reduced homelessness. In fact, it has made it more difficult for many people to escape homelessness. The heavy reliance on arrests, especially those that involve charges of drug dealing, make it more difficult to access social services, employment, and permanent housing. Tens of thousands of citations were issued under this program in keeping with the “broken windows” philosophy. The fines associated with these citations generally cannot be paid by the poor people who receive them, which causes them to turn into warrants. In a single 14-month period, 1,200 people were arrested in the SCI area just for unpaid citations (Los Angeles Community Action Network [LACAN], 2009b). These arrests, which were part of the total of 27,000 during a 3-year period, can have devastating consequences because even a short period in custody can mean the loss of a job or housing.

The worst-case scenario for those arrested is to be charged with drug dealing. This occurrence is increasingly common as charging policies at the District Attorney's (DA's) office and police narcotics enforcement practices have changed during the course of the SCI (Blasi, 2007: 37; Rubin, 2007). Approximately half the arrests under the SCI are for drug offenses, and of these, approximately half are for sales or possession with intent to sell (Blasi, 2007: 33). According to a review of SCI-related cases, most of those charged with dealing are caught with only \$20 worth of drugs as a result of police “buy and bust” operations, and in most of these cases, the DA has pushed for felony dealing convictions with multiyear sentences (Blasi, 2007: 34).

A conviction for sales or possession with intent to sell makes these arrestees permanently ineligible for a variety of services, including public housing, federal financial aid for college and training programs, food stamps, and welfare (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF]). Many residential treatment programs and even transitional and permanent supportive housing assume the availability of food stamps, TANF, and other funding streams that are not available to those convicted of drug dealing, thus jeopardizing these programs and potentially making access to them impossible for those blocked from receiving federal assistance. Research on employment for those with even lower level drug convictions indicates substantial impedi-

ments to hiring for even low-skill positions (Pager, 2007), blocking another potential pathway out of homelessness.

Those convicted of drug sales are also ineligible for services provided under California's Proposition 36, which was designed to divert low-level drug offenders, mostly addicts, from the prison system and send them to treatment instead. By treating so many Skid Row addicts as dealers, the police and the DA are essentially ignoring the will of voters who did not want those types of drug offenders in prison. Overall, the effect is to make this population less able to end their homelessness by limiting their access to treatment services, employment, and subsidized housing, which are exactly what has been proven necessary to help people escape homelessness.

The use of law enforcement to address conditions on Skid Row has another negative consequence for the poor and homeless people living there. The heavy use of citations and arrests significantly degrades the quality of life for many of these people, some of whom have never been charged with anything more serious than jaywalking or littering. There is also substantial evidence that some enforcement efforts associated with SCI have been extralegal in nature involving racial profiling, illegal searches, and excessive use of force. In January 2009, the LAPD was forced to agree to change its stop-and-search policies significantly in response to a lawsuit by the American Civil Liberties Union and National Lawyers Guild. The suit claimed that officers were making stops and searches without any probable cause, which a federal judge found to be unconstitutional. In April 2009, the LACAN filed a complaint with the Department of Justice asking them to investigate a pattern of civil rights abuses by the LAPD in the Skid Row area. The complaint alleges widespread racial profiling and describes numerous instances of police using excessive force, including six cases in which there is video or photo evidence or corroborating witnesses (LACAN, 2009a).

### **Removal of Homeless and Poor People**

One policy area in which the SCI has clearly been successful is the removal of large numbers of visible homeless and poor people from the streets of Skid Row. These results are consistent with the use of broken windows theory for the removal of disorderly populations. The heavy and sustained issuing of citations and subsequent arrests for unpaid tickets was central to the removal of "squeegee men" from New York City under the Dinkins Administration (Kelling, Julian, and Miller, 1994). The aggressive use of citations was also at the center of strategies to remove homeless people and aggressive panhandlers from commercial areas in San Francisco, Seattle, and Baltimore (Kelling and Coles, 1997). This is in contrast to the much more mixed results from evaluations of the reduction in serious crime from this strategy (Harcourt, 2005; Taylor, 2000).

A major effort to gentrify the Skid Row area has been underway for several years, and its major impediment was the large number of social services provided there and the homeless and poor populations who sought and received those services. Tent cities, open-air drug markets, and public defecation are an anathema to a well-functioning urban environment. Ironically,

it was an earlier land-use decision made by the city that led to this concentration of services in an effort to encourage the development of the downtown core in the 1980s and to protect residential areas from bearing the burden of providing social services to the poor. Now that developers are seeking to expand into Skid Row with its proximity to downtown, the city seems to be taking action to clear out this concentration of poor people and social services. However, rather than providing alternatives to Skid Row that improve the lives of those displaced, they are cycling people through the criminal justice system or displacing them into other poor areas with already inadequate social services.

### Alternatives

Policy makers must consider whether the possibility of small reductions in crime combined with the physical removal of homeless people is worth the enhanced law enforcement costs, as well as worth the worsening of conditions for a large group of those arrested and displaced. They must also consider whether it is a legitimate government function to use law enforcement resources to aid primarily in real estate development efforts without regard to the well-being of those displaced—a return to the discredited urban renewal practices of the 1950s and 1960s. However, alternatives to this approach have proven effective in reducing homelessness and in reducing the cost of cycling people in and out of hospitals, jails, and treatment facilities. Permanent housing with appropriate support services built in has shown great success in keeping people housed, even for people with mental health and substance abuse problems—the groups that tend to be the greatest source of disorderly behavior and the most costly if left unhoused (Lipton, Siegel, Hannigan, Samuels, and Baker, 2000; Nelson, Aubry, and Lafrance, 2007; Pearson, Montgomery, and Locke, 2009; Rog, 2004).

Leaving people to sleep on the streets and in shelters is expensive. The biggest single cost is providing health care, followed by the costs of incarceration, both of which are reduced substantially when a person is housed. A recent study of more than 10,000 homeless people in Los Angeles County showed that the average monthly cost to keep a person in supportive housing is \$605, whereas the average cost in city services for a homeless person is \$2,897 (Flaming, Matsunaga, and Burns, 2009). The policy implications of this research are clear. Cities need to divert resources from emergency services and incarceration toward supportive housing. The results will both reduce costs and improve public order.

### References

- Berk, Richard and John MacDonald. 2010. Policing the homeless: An evaluation of efforts to reduce homeless-related crime. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Blasi, Gary. 2007. *Policing our way out of homelessness?: The first year of the Safer Cities Initiative on Skid Row*. Los Angeles: University of California at Los Angeles School of Law.
- Blasi, Gary and Forrest Stuart. 2008. *Has the Safer Cities Initiative in Skid Row Reduced Serious Crime?* Los Angeles: University of California at Los Angeles School of Law.

- Blumstein, Alfred and Joel Wallman, eds. 2006. *The Crime Drop in America*. New York: Cambridge.
- Flaming, Daniel, Michael Matsunaga, and Patrick Burns. 2009. *Where We Sleep: The Costs of Housing and Homelessness in Los Angeles*. Los Angeles, CA: Economic Roundtable.
- Harcourt, Bernard E. 2005. *Illusion of Order: The False Promise of Broken Windows Policing*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kelling, George and Catherine Coles. 1997. *Fixing Broken Windows: Restoring Order and Reducing Crime in Our Communities*. New York: Free Press.
- Kelling, George, Michael Julian, and Steven Miller. 1994. *Managing "Squeegeeing": A Problem Solving Exercise*. New York: New York Police Department.
- LACAN. 2009a. Request for Investigation and Remedies for Violations of Title 42, U.S.C., Section 14141 (Police Misconduct Statute). Retrieved May 17, 2010 from [wraphome.org/downloads/doj-complaint-draft.pdf](http://wraphome.org/downloads/doj-complaint-draft.pdf).
- LACAN. 2009b. *Three Years of the Safer City Initiative*. Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles Community Action Network.
- Lipton, Frank R., Carole Siegel, Anthony Hannigan, Judy Samuels, and Sherryl Baker. 2000. Tenure in supportive housing for homeless persons with severe mental illness. *Psychiatric Services*, 51: 479–486.
- Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority. 2005. *2005 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count*. Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority.
- Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority. 2009. *2009 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count*. Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority.
- Mac Donald, Heather. 2009. The truth about policing and Skid Row. *City Journal, Eye on the News*, September 28. Retrieved April 30, 2010 from [city-journal.org/2009/eon0928hm.html](http://city-journal.org/2009/eon0928hm.html).
- Nelson, Geoff, Tim Aubry, and Adele Lafrance. 2007. A review of the literature on the effectiveness of housing and support, assertive community treatment, and intensive case management interventions for persons with mental illness who have been homeless. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 77: 350–361.
- Pager, Devah. 2007. *Marked: Race, Crime, and Finding Work in an Era of Mass Incarceration*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Pearson, Carol, Ann E. Montgomery, and Gretchen Locke. 2009. Housing stability among homeless individuals with serious mental illness participating in housing first programs. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 37: 404–417.
- Rog, Debra J. 2004. The evidence on supported housing. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 27: 334–344.
- Rubin, Anat. 2007. Prosecutors target drug sales on Skid Row. *Los Angeles Daily Journal*, January 29.
- Taylor, Ralph B. 2000. *Breaking Away from Broken Windows: Baltimore Neighborhoods and the Nationwide Fight against Crime, Grime, Fear, and Decline*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Wolch, Jennifer, Michael Dear, Gari Blasi, Paul Tepper, Dan Flaming, and Paul Koegel with Daniel Warshawsky 2007. *Ending Homelessness in Los Angeles*. Los Angeles, CA. Inter-University Consortium to End Homelessness.

Zimring, Franklin E. 2007. *The Great American Crime Decline*. New York: Oxford University Press.

---

**Alex S. Vitale** is an associate professor of sociology at Brooklyn College, where he teaches criminology and sociology of law. He is the author of *City of Disorder: How the Quality of Life Campaign Transformed New York Politics* (2008) and has also published in *Urban Affairs Review*, *Policing and Society*, *Police Practice and Research*, and *Contemporary Sociology*. From 1990 to 1993, he worked at the San Francisco Coalition on Homelessness.



## POLICY ESSAY

---

### REDUCING HOMELESS-RELATED CRIME

# Policy essay on “Policing the Homeless An Evaluation of Efforts to Reduce Homeless-Related Crime”

**Michael Rowe**  
**Maria O’Connell**

*Yale University*

**B**erk and MacDonald (2010, this issue) put to the test a highly publicized program of place-based crime prevention and reduction—the Safer Cities Initiative (SCI) in the Skid Row district of Los Angeles. Employing a time-series analytic method involving 8 consecutive years (2000–2007) of data on violent, property, and nuisance street crimes in association with shutting down homeless encampments in the district, Berk and MacDonald (2010) conclude that the SCI produced reductions in all three types of crime while succeeding in closing all homeless encampments. In addition—and critical to making a strong case for the success of the place-based approach—decreases in crime in the Skid Row district were not matched by an increase in crime levels in surrounding districts, and no new homeless encampments were built in these districts after the dissolution of those in the Central Division (Skid Row). This essay takes up first the author’s methods and then discusses other concerns we have with the study.

### **Methods**

Berk and MacDonald (2010) convincingly present advanced statistical models that examine the impact of two Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) interventions targeting crime associated with Skid Row encampments in the Central Division of the LAPD. The first intervention was a pilot project called the “Main Street Project” that focused on reducing the density of homeless encampments in a four-city-block portion of downtown Los Angeles. The Main Street Project officially began on September 27, 2005 (week 300) and was followed by several additional interventions staged over the course of the next several weeks (i.e., removal of Skid Row porta

---

Direct correspondence to Michael Rowe, Yale University School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry, Program for Recovery and Community Health, 319 Peck Street, Bldg 1, New Haven, CT 06513  
(e-mail: Michael.rowe@yale.edu); Maria O’Connell, Yale University School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry, Program for Recovery and Community Health, 319 Peck Street, Bldg 1, New Haven, CT 06513  
(e-mail: maria.oconnell@yale.edu).

potties and the deployment of 43 additional recruit officers). The second intervention was the full-scale launching of the SCI, which began almost a year later on September 17, 2006. The SCI placed 50 full-time officers in downtown Los Angeles to break up homeless encampments, issue citations, and make arrests. Using a generalized additive time-series model, Berk and MacDonald (2010) controlled for downward trends observed in rates of crime in the Central Division over the course of the 8 years and postintervention decreases observed in the four control divisions. They conclude that the Main Street Project and the SCI produced modest crime reductions in the Central Division, even after controlling for similar trends in neighboring communities. Berk and MacDonald (2010) explain the comparably strong effects toward decreased crime observed in neighboring communities in the postintervention period as “spillover effects” from the SCI. We suggest that something else may have occurred.

As one reviews the complex data presented by Berk and MacDonald (2010), it does seem that the Main Street Project and SCI led to significant decreases in all three crime types. But examining closely the trend in the data from 2000 onward, a gradual decrease in crime occurred in the Central Division over time (controlled for in Berk and MacDonald’s (2010) statistical models) with one key exception—from approximately week 200 to week 294, or approximately October 2003 to August 2005. The first question we must ask is: What happened during this period of time that led to the sharp and dramatic increase in all types of crime not only in the Central Division, but also in neighboring communities?

We hypothesize that the appearance of increased crime can be attributed to additional scrutiny of persons who are homeless and to crime in the area at this time, related to enhanced media coverage and/or community and political pressures. In addition, Chief William Bratton was appointed as chief of police of Los Angeles in October 2002. As Berk and MacDonald (2010) note, Chief Bratton was one of the major proponents of the “broken windows” policing strategies and was well known for his deployment of similar policing strategies when he was Commissioner of the New York Police Department in the 1990s. Could his influence have led police to begin citing for more nuisance crimes, thus producing what seem to be increased crime rates, prior to launch of the SCI? Yet if a crackdown on misdemeanor and nuisance crimes occurred in association with Chief Bratton’s arrival, then we might expect to view evidence of this surge from the time he took office in 2002, not toward the end of 2003.

A difficulty here is that Berk and MacDonald (2010) do not specify the source of their “crime counts,” and they do not define precisely what the term means, that is, whether these are counts of reported crimes, citations given, or arrests. Assuming, however, that the counts are for reported crimes, what is the reason for the increase from October 2003 through August 2005? Could it be that media coverage during 2004 contributed to a surge in reporting nuisance crimes or to a dramatic increase in police officers writing up citations for them? Yet violent crime and property crimes also seem to increase markedly during this period. It is far more difficult to imagine that these more serious crimes had a sudden “reporting surge” during this time.

Although initiation of the Main Street Project and SCI seems to coincide with the decrease in crime, could it also be that whatever was contributing to the dramatic increase in crime in



the months prior to the interventions ceased to exist, especially because the immediate effects were observed in nonintervention communities as well? What was happening with homeless shelters during this time? What about jail capacity rates? Could the decrease in crime be a result of increased incarceration rates in the almost 2-year period prior to the interventions? If so, it would not be surprising to observe a subsequent decrease in crime levels.

Possibly of greatest concern is Berk and MacDonald's (2010) reasoning for selecting week 294—the time of a dramatic decrease in crime rates—as the “start” date for the Main Street Project, when the intervention began officially closer to week 300. The authors state that they selected this week as a time when there was much publicized about the initiation of the SCI and that key stakeholders were already preparing for the initiative. They also note that if they move the start date to week 300 (the formal start date of the Main Street Project initiative), the effects for reduced nuisance crime as a result of the intervention disappear. Yet again, we must ask what, or whether, something out of the ordinary, based on local conditions or events or other circumstances, was happening in the Skid Row district and possibly other districts around week 294, and whether SCI planning and coordination and general awareness of its start date, rather than the intervention itself, caused the decrease in crime rates at week 294. By week 300, most of the effects were already realized. The following suggestions might be true:

- Aggressive social service efforts to provide supports for people who are homeless helped to divert some of the crime, or some of the people who might be arrested for them.
- Increased community vigilance contributed to less crime in these neighborhoods.
- Enhanced community planning and coordination contributed to the decrease in crime rate.
- Increased police presence itself contributed to decreased crime, not to an increase in citations. (However, we might expect to observe an increase in citations after the official start of the Main Street Project and SCI, as police were supposed to be cracking down on quality-of-life crimes through increased citations.)

Finally, Berk and MacDonald (2010) make a single statement in their concluding section that most of the crime in the Central Division likely occurred in areas outside of the Skid Row encampment because the largest decrease in crime occurred after implementation of the Main Street Project—a small, pilot intervention focusing on a few key blocks in the Central Division outside of Skid Row. Yet Skid Row is the main subject of the study by Berk and MacDonald (2010) because of its high volume of homeless people and the problems said to be associated with them. If the police intervention was the key to reducing the crime, we can wonder whether the degree of enforcement employed was necessary, because most reductions were observed in the period around the inception of the Main Street Project, which was, in essence, a much smaller scale rollout of the SCI.

### Other Concerns

We have several other concerns about the study by Berk and MacDonald (2010). We note at the outset that they, appropriately, do not pronounce on the SCI's effectiveness in comparison with other possible interventions. Moreover, they acknowledge that a reduction of crime might benefit persons who are homeless—often victims rather than perpetrators of crime—and caution that the SCI does not constitute a response to the social-structural problems and challenges of homelessness in the United States. The overarching impression we have of the article, however, with its highly detailed emphasis on statistical methods and analytic procedures to the exclusion of contextual factors, brings to mind for us Barak and Bohm's 1989 critique of a value-neutral approach and lack of "reflexivity" in criminology, that is, criminologists' failure to question the grounds of their research when, in fact, "selection of an object of study, as well as the method by which to study it, is a moral enterprise" (1989: 276).

How did people living in the homeless encampments (thought to be associated with crime problems in the area; Berk and MacDonald's article [2010]) end up there? If this question is beyond the scope of the article, then it does not seem to us to be beyond its scope to say that some attention could have been paid to where these persons went when the encampments were closed, as they did not create new ones in surrounding districts. Living in a homeless encampment may, in fact, expose one to crime (although, presumably, it could protect one against it under some circumstances), but one does have to live somewhere. In addition, because, in the words of Berk and MacDonald (2010), the homeless encampments likely contributed little to increases in crime in the Skid Row district, we are left with the question, "Why was it necessary to close homeless encampments to reduce crime in Skid Row?"

Blasi and Stuart, in a 2008 report written without some of the data available to Berk and MacDonald (2010), offered a skeptical view of the SCI in terms of the modest effect size of the reduction in crime it produced. This modest effect, they write, occurs in association with the facts that thousands of citations (pointed out as evidence of the program's success) were issued for crosswalk violations and many others for littering on streets with no trash cans, with the lack of social and housing services originally planned to accompany the crackdown on crime and on homeless encampments, and with the likelihood that a massive deployment of police officers in other areas would have produced comparable, if not better, results (Blasi and Stuart, 2008). We refer the reader to this report for its contextual analysis of the SCI's effectiveness.

It is surprising that broken windows theory (Wilson and Kelling, 2000), which provided the conceptual framework for the SCI, receives such scant attention in the study by Berk and MacDonald (2010). Using the context at hand, for example, the theory hypothesizes that nuisance (panhandling) or offensive (urinating in public, often because of lack of access to a toilet) behavior leads to a breakdown of public order and to more serious crime. Amster (2003) reviewed the following problems with the broken windows approach:

- It belongs to a long tradition of historical efforts in the United States to regulate the movement and behavior of poor persons and remove them from public view.

- It demonizes persons who are the first to feel, and the last to recover from, economic downturns and structural problems in the economy. (Illegal immigrants are perhaps more markedly the objects of this demonization at present, but homeless persons are a close second.)
- Broken windows theory has been applied to putatively “broken people” who, apparently (and here the logic falls down) are not to be fixed but instead are cited for the crime of brokenness and removed from sight.
- It punishes persons for a behavior that might, it is hypothesized, lead to the behavior (serious crime) that apparently is the true object of the broken windows fix, which flies in the face of equal punishment for equal crimes that the criminal justice system espouses.
- Finally, broken windows, as applied to people, represents the dehumanization of them. In so doing, it also sanitizes the unsavory process of running people out of their homes.

As indicated previously, an argument can be made that at least some of our caveats can be dismissed on the basis that they go beyond the scope of the article by Berk and MacDonald (2010). We plead a variation on our earlier point (drawing on Barak and Bohm, 2008): Given longstanding negative views of homeless people, in an article concerning a district with a large population of people who are homeless in a county with the greatest concentration of homelessness in the country, at a time when the United States is struggling to emerge from a devastating economic recession, these issues merit more attention than Berk and MacDonald (2010) give them. In addition, the article focuses almost all of its analysis on crime incidence without linking changes in their rates to a reduction in homelessness and homeless encampments. Berk and MacDonald (2010) do acknowledge that “the modest crime reductions imply that much of the crime, perhaps even most crime, in the Central Division was not driven by the Skid Row homeless encampment,” but the overarching message of “[g]etting tough on the homeless” and the implicit linking of crime and disorder with homeless encampments overshadow such caveats.

Berk and MacDonald (2010), not excepting our methodological concerns, make a plausible claim that place-based policing can have an impact on reducing crime, assuming that this reduction does not simply represent a displacement of crime to other areas. As such, their analysis might have a contribution, with attention to the caveats we have given previously, to make to policy deliberations about response to urban crime. In addition, the process of closing down homeless encampments, assuming it is accompanied with housing and other services and supports for displaced persons, may provide useful knowledge (including consideration of “how not to” as well as “how to” close down a homeless encampment) for policy development. The fact, however, that homeless encampments of the size of those in the Skid Row area were not established in nearby districts does not seem astonishing, given that word-of-mouth would suggest that a new one might not last long. Beyond these points, however, many questions remain that center on the relationship between homelessness and crime, including crimes of varying magnitude; the level of crime, public risk, public nuisance, and quality of life in the Skid Row district in

comparison with the cost and effectiveness of other possible interventions; and the availability of social services, treatment, and housing with supports for people who are homeless.

We close by suggesting that crime and homelessness in poor urban areas, and the relationship between the two, involve attention to a wide range of practices and research at the intersection of the two, and that integrated social, economic, and criminal justice approaches must be developed separately from or in association with law enforcement efforts. Three of many candidates are listed as follows:

*Community asset mapping and community development.* Community asset mapping, which emphasizes community strengths and potential for growth and renewal, has become increasingly influential in community development planning and implementation (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993). This approach is conducive, also, to university-civil society collaborations in which colleges and universities bring their intellectual capital to their local, often impoverished, communities (Ostrander, 2004). Effective approaches to community building through community asset development, in addition to crime prevention and responses to concentrated homelessness that benefit local “housed” residents and homeless people, might be particularly promising in a time of federal Recovery Act initiatives (although the window might be closing).

*Law enforcement–social service agency interface.* Homeless outreach teams, community-based programs such as soup kitchens, and others have developed (carefully and uneasily) working partnerships of varying degrees with police officers and departments. One mental health program with which we worked involved homeless persons training police cadets in the experience of homelessness and mental illness and of being approached by police officers on the street (Rowe et al., 2009). An outreach team with which we are conducting research in Marseille, France, has piloted a partnership between a district mental health outreach team and the police in, among other objectives, identifying and marking persons with mental illness who require immediate treatment and other services. Finally, Recovery Act funding is now available for innovative community-based responses to work with ex-offenders, including many people who were homeless when arrested and/or will be after release, who are returning to their communities.

*Supported housing.* During the past decade, supportive housing for people who are homeless has emerged as perhaps the individual intervention par excellence for ending homelessness (Culhane, Metraux, and Hadley, 2002; Tsemberis, Gulcur, and Nakae, 2004). If closing down homeless encampments is a good idea, it is a good idea only if alternatives are being offered to people other than to leave where they are and not return.

As a final point, we would like to argue that effective and enlightened responses to crime and to homelessness—including proper differentiation between the two—require an integrated approach that involves local, state, and federal planning and resources, as well as multiple partners—local citizens, social and economic resources, investment, and policy makers, law enforcement, and others to address social problems that affect us all, and especially those who are forced to live on the streets because they do not have a home.

## References

- Amster, Randall. 2003. Patterns of exclusion: Sanitizing space, criminalizing homelessness. *Social Justice*, 30: 195–221.
- Barak, Gregg and Robert M. Bohm. 1989. The crimes of the homeless or the crime of homelessness? On the dialectics of criminalization, decriminalization, and victimization. *Contemporary Crises*, 13: 275–288.
- Berk, Richard and John MacDonald. 2010. Policing the homeless: An evaluation of efforts to reduce homeless-related crime. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Blasi, Gary and Forest Stuart. 2008. *Research Report: Has the Safer Cities Initiative in Skid Row Reduced Serious Crime?* Retrieved May 12, 2010 from [http://cdn.law.ucla.edu/SiteCollectionDocuments/missing%20files/did\\_safer\\_cities\\_reduce\\_crime\\_in\\_skid\\_row.pdf](http://cdn.law.ucla.edu/SiteCollectionDocuments/missing%20files/did_safer_cities_reduce_crime_in_skid_row.pdf).
- Culhane Dennis P., Stephen Metraux, and Trevor R. Hadley. 2002. Public service reductions associated with placement of homeless persons with severe mental illness in supportive housing. *Departmental Papers (SPP)*.
- Kretzmann, John P. and John L. McKnight. 1993. *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*. Chicago, IL: ACTA.
- Ostrander, Susan A. 2004. Democracy, civic participation, and the university: A comparative study of civic engagement on five campuses. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 33: 74–93.
- Rowe, Michael, Patricia Benedict, Dave Sells, Tom Dinzeo, Charles Garvin, Lesley Schwab, Madelon Baranoski, Vincent Girard, and Chyrell Bellamy. 2009. Citizenship, community, and recovery: A group- and peer-based intervention for persons with co-occurring disorders and criminal justice histories. *Journal for Groups in Addiction & Recovery*, 4: 224–244.
- Tsemberis, Sam, Leyla Gulcur, and Maria Nakae. 2004. Housing first, consumer choice, and harm reduction for homeless individuals with a dual diagnosis. *American Journal of Public Health*, 94: 651–656.
- Wilson, James Q. and George L. Kelling. 2000. Broken windows: The police and neighborhood safety. *Atlantic Monthly*, March.

---

**Michael Rowe**, a sociologist in the Yale Department of Psychiatry's Program for Recovery and Community Health, researches and writes on homelessness and mental illness, citizenship and mental illness, and their professional, institutional, and social contexts.

**Maria O'Connell**, a psychologist in the Yale Department of Psychiatry's Program for Recovery and Community Health, researches and writes on client choice including advance directives, and recovery from mental illness.



# POLICY ESSAY

## REDUCING HOMELESS-RELATED CRIME

### Jim Longstreet, Mike Marshall, and the lost art of policing skid row

**Michael D. White**

*Arizona State University*

In “Policing the homeless: An evaluation of efforts to reduce homeless-related crime,” Berk and MacDonald (2010, this issue) explore the impact of the Los Angeles Police Department’s (LAPD) Safer Cities Initiative (SCI)—a place-based strategy targeting the homeless inhabitants of Los Angeles’ Skid Row district. The SCI reflected the spirit of Chief Bratton’s earlier efforts in New York City, focusing on low-level crime with saturation patrol (i.e., 50 officers) and an aggressive zero-tolerance approach.<sup>1</sup> It was simply “getting tough on the homeless.” Berk and MacDonald note the following:

The officers worked eastward through the Skid Row section, breaking up homeless encampments, issuing citations, and making arrests for violations of the law. The plan was to clear out specific street areas, maintain a visible police presence for at least a week, and then move onto other parts of downtown.

Berk and MacDonald find “meaningful but modest crime reductions” in the target area with evidence of spillover effects to the surrounding police divisions, but they find no indications of displacement.

In this policy essay, I am not going to address the article’s methodology or statistical approach—or even its findings—although I commend Berk and MacDonald (2010) for the

---

Jim Longstreet and Mike Marshall are police officers described in William Ker Muir’s (1977) *Police: Streetcorner Politicians*. I will use Longstreet and Marshall, as well as a third officer (Bee Haywood), to illustrate points concerning the effective and ineffective policing of Skid Row. The author would like to thank Robert Kane, Charles Katz, and Justin Ready for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay. Direct correspondence to Michael D. White, Arizona State University, 411 N. Central Ave., Suite 600, mail code 4420, Phoenix, AZ 85004-0685 (e-mail: mdwhite1@asu.edu).

1. Chief Bratton later expressed concern about the negative connotations associated with the term “zero tolerance,” arguing instead that “order maintenance” is more appropriate (see Bratton, 1998). The terms often are used interchangeably in the literature, and a close read of the tactics employed as part of the LAPD’s SCI suggests that they are consistent with prevailing definitions of zero tolerance (see Dixon, 2005; Sherman, 1998).

complexity and thoughtfulness in which they carried out the study. Instead, near the end of the article, Berk and MacDonald acknowledge that they have not addressed the public policy implications of the SCI. It is this issue that I would like to consider. Specifically, I will make four points that not only question the appropriateness of the SCI but also suggest that use of zero-tolerance strategies against the homeless represents a shift away from professional policing. First, the police role is enormously broad, and I will argue that peacekeeping is a central and critical function of the police. Second, I will draw on the works of Egon Bittner and William Ker Muir to demonstrate that peacekeeping as a strategy for policing Skid Row is a lost art. To use Muir's character, Mike Marshall knew how to police Skid Row, and he offered important lessons on how to accomplish it effectively and humanely. Third, I will argue that the widespread adoption of community and problem-oriented policing (COP and POP, respectively) has served to institutionalize many principles laid out by Bittner and Muir, and that the body of knowledge on COP and POP serves as an important backdrop for contextualizing the SCI. Last, I will describe the negative side effects of aggressive, zero-tolerance policing and argue that those consequences are especially harmful when the strategy is deployed against a population that is disproportionately vulnerable, such as the homeless. In the end, this essay does not question whether the SCI achieved its goals of eliminating homeless encampments and reducing crime on Skid Row. It seems to have done both—at least temporarily. Instead, I draw on what we know about policing Skid Row—or perhaps what we have forgotten—as well as the current state of knowledge on effective police practices to question the SCI itself. Simply put, does the SCI represent good policing?

### The Police Role

It is certainly not an earth-shattering notion to state that the responsibilities of the police far exceed crime control and criminal law enforcement.<sup>2</sup> In his classic book, *Varieties of Police Behavior*, Wilson (1968) reported that just 10% of a police officer's time was devoted to crime-fighting activities. The Police Services Study examined 25,000 calls for service in three cities and found that only 19% involved crime (Mastrofski, 1983; Scott, 1981; see also Greene and Klockars, 1991, whose estimates are slightly higher). So if the police spend so little time engaged in crime fighting, then what is it they are doing? In Wilson's terminology, police spend approximately 70% of their time engaging in service-related and order-maintenance tasks, which Manning (1978: 107) characterized as "finding lost children, substituting as ambulance drivers or interceding in quarrels of one sort or another (see also Bayley, 1994)." Westley (1970: 19) called it the "dirty work, [consisting of] dealing with drunks, with the insane, with the dead, with the vice-ridden, with the ill." Bittner (1974: 244) suggested in the following that the non-crime-related duties of the police know no bounds:

All this suggests more than the obvious point that the duties of a patrolmen are of

---

2. Although I use the term "police" generally, the focus of this essay is on patrol officers.



a mind-boggling variety, it compels the stronger inference that no human problem exists, or is imaginable, about which it could be said with finality that this certainly could not become the proper business of the police.

Both Bittner (1974) and Westley (1970) go on to contend that the non-crime-related activities are a vital part of police business. Moreover, Bittner argued that these responsibilities fell to the police because of their “unique competence” to use coercive force, suggesting that the core role of the police involves dealing with “*something-that-ought-not-to-be-happening-and-about-which-someone-had-better-do-something-now!*” (Bittner, 1974: 31).<sup>3</sup>

A huge part of this amorphous mandate—and the part that is most relevant for policing Skid Row—is the peacekeeping function. Banton (1964: 7) persuasively laid out the early arguments for viewing police as peacekeepers, maintaining that even in “urban residential neighborhoods there is a very real sense of community.” It is the job of the police, he asserted, to engage in peacekeeping to maintain the agreed-upon rules of the community by reinforcing informal social controls. “The policeman obtains public cooperation, and enjoys public esteem, because he enforces standards accepted by the community” (Banton, 1964: 3).

The broad mandate of the police, with peacekeeping as a central feature, has direct implications for conceptions of good policing, and few have captured the complexity of these issues better than Muir (1977) in his book *Police: Streetcorner Politicians*. Borrowing from Weber’s model of the professional politician, Muir (1977: 50) argued that the professional policeman has the following qualities: The officer is morally reconciled with the use of coercive force (called “passion”), and the officer understands the dignity and tragedy of the human condition (called “perspective” or empathy). Within this framework, Muir also described the following types of nonprofessional policeman: enforcers (those with passion but no perspective), reciprocators (those with perspective but no passion), and avoiders (those who lack both passion and perspective). Muir’s conception of good policing has relevance both for the larger body of research on zero-tolerance policing as well as for the use of such strategies against the homeless (i.e., the SCI).

### **Policing Skid Row**

In his classic 1967 article, Bittner adopts Banton’s (1964) peacekeeping framework to describe the principles of effective policing on Skid Row (aptly titled “The police on skid row: A study of peacekeeping”). Muir (1977) also applied his professional policing framework to Skid Row, and I will use his police characters—Jim Longstreet, Bee Haywood, and Mike Marshall—as illustrations of both Bittner’s principles and Muir’s “passion and perspective,” all of which is relevant for contextualizing the LAPD’s SCI. Bittner asserted that officers assigned to Skid Row developed three techniques to keep the peace effectively on their beat. The first technique, *the*

3. Of course, the irony of the police role lies in their overemphasis on the small slice of their work that involves crime fighting (i.e., chasing the “Willie Suttons”) and their traditional negative view toward the order-maintenance, service, and peacekeeping tasks that dominate their daily activity (i.e., acting like Florence Nightingale; Bittner, 1974; see also Manning, 1978).

*particularization of knowledge*, involves developing a rich, detailed knowledge (and understanding) of everything and everyone on the Skid Row beat. The development and maintenance of this knowledge base occurs through personal relationships with the people who live on Skid Row. Bittner (1967: 707) noted the following:

As a general rule, the skid-row policeman possesses an immensely detailed factual knowledge of his beat. He knows, and knows a great deal about, a large number of residents. He is likely to know every person who manages or works in the local bars, hotels, shops, stores, and missions. Moreover, he probably knows every public and private place inside and out. Finally, he ordinarily remembers countless events of the past which he can recount by citing names, dates and places with remarkable precision.

Bittner noted that this rich knowledge not only gave police officers an idea of what to expect from each person they interacted with (e.g., what has worked and not worked in the past) but it also granted them intimate access to the lives and places on their beat. One officer noted, "If I want to be in control of my work and keep the street relatively peaceful, I have to know the people. To know them I must gain their trust, which means that I have to be involved in their lives" (Bittner, 1967: 709).

The second technique employed by police to keep the peace on Skid Row is *the restricted relevance of culpability*. Alternatives to arrest always are preferred in minor issues/offenses, and in fact, to make an arrest solely to enforce the law in a minor case is considered "poor craftsmanship" (Bittner, 1967: 711). Rather, officers assigned to Skid Row use the law as a tool to solve larger, more pressing issues and to prevent the escalation of further problems. As a result, in certain cases, a person will "need" to be arrested for a minor offense. Officers view these "preventive arrests" as a tool both to preserve order and to protect the arrestee from future harm. "The best among the patrolmen, according to their own standards, use the law to keep skid-row inhabitants from sinking deeper into the misery they already experience" (Bittner, 1967: 711).

Bittner's (1967) third technique is *the background of ad hoc decision making*. On Skid Row, the arrest decision is not determined by the circumstances of an individual case. Rather, arrest decisions are made in the pursuit of reducing aggregate risk and producing peace (Bittner, 1967). Although this approach may seem arbitrary, Bittner (1967) maintained that every decision an officer makes draws on his vast knowledge of the goings-on in Skid Row, which gives him a truly unique understanding of the circumstances. "The overall objective is to reduce the total amount of risk in the area . . . [Police] intervene not in the interest of law enforcement but in the interest of producing relative tranquility and order on the street" (Bittner, 1967: 713).

Muir (1977) introduced three police officers who work on Skid Row. Two of the officers (Jim Longstreet and Bee Haywood) do not adhere to Bittner's (1967) principles, and their stories illustrate the consequences of policing Skid Row poorly. The other, Mike Marshall, is Muir's professional policeman. The first officer, Jim Longstreet, had adopted neglect as his primary tactic. In Muir's (1977) terms, he was an avoider who lacked both passion and per-

spective. “My rule is no ticket is worth it if he’s going after my job, and I’ll let him have his way. It’s sickening; you shouldn’t have to do it. But I’m paranoid about this stuff” (Muir, 1977: 65). Muir (1977: 65, 67) observed that Longstreet worked hard to avoid “difficulty” and “hot situations.” Unfortunately, this avoidance/neglect strategy has dire consequences for Skid Row and for the surrounding community. Inevitably, those “who stood to profit from the policeman’s absence—the strong-arm, the bully, the vicious” will notice the officer’s withdrawal, and “when the rebels against authority knew they were in control, skid row went to hell in a hand basket” (Muir, 1977: 66).

The second officer, Bee Haywood, thrived on using physical violence against the residents of Skid Row. He was an enforcer who had passion but no perspective. In his own words, he had “gone to ‘Knuckletown’ with a great many residents of skid row”; in Muir’s words, Haywood had become lawless (Muir, 1977: 69). Officers like Haywood who relied on violence experienced several negative consequences from their brutal actions. First, the use of violence by police inevitably escalated the conflicts on Skid Row, as residents soon learned what to expect and responded in kind (Muir, 1977). Second, residents learned to avoid the violence-prone officers and gave them little in the way of useful information. As a result, Haywood—and others like him—became completely disconnected from the goings-on of Skid Row (Muir, 1977).

The third officer, Mike Marshall, had both passion and perspective. And, unlike Longstreet and Haywood, Marshall represents the core principles that Bittner (1967) identified for effective policing on Skid Row. Marshall (Muir, 1977: 78) stated the following:

I think I know everybody on my beat. Maybe 5,000 persons. And I try to learn all their names and their faces . . . I prefer to have them call me ‘Mike’, and they prefer to have me call them that way. A wino comes up, and by calling you by your first name he gets a feeling of equality. By giving them a feeling of equality, you are making a friend of them.

Marshall clearly demonstrates the *particularization of knowledge* principle. Just as importantly, Muir (1977: 79) noted that Marshall had developed both eloquence and empathy in the way he carried out his work, and in doing so, Marshall “neutralized the fear, distrust and antagonism” that characterized the beats worked by Longstreet and Haywood. The consequences of Marshall’s efforts for both himself and his beat were profound, as noted in the following:

Marshall’s development of skid row had transformed the dispossessed of that community into ‘good citizens’, into people who had something to lose and therefore something to protect—a line of credit, a decent friendship, a good public servant, whatever it was that Marshall had come to represent through ‘a life spent in doing good before their eyes.’

One consequence of this professional response was that the community tended

to develop confidence in the beat patrolman. It became more open, had a greater sense of security, and enjoyed a number of little productive happinesses. For the officer himself, one result was that he developed a feeling of safety, a more informed understanding of his beat, and considerable moral gratification from doing the job well. (Muir, 1977: 79–80)

Although the research by Bittner (1967) and Muir (1977) is more than 30 years old, I believe the principles they describe are still relevant today.<sup>4</sup> They are the principles of good craftsmanship. Importantly, these principles (empathy, moral acceptance of coercive authority, protection of the vulnerable, prevention, and problem solving) are central tenets of community- and problem-oriented policing, which dominate today's policing landscape.

### **What We Know about Zero Tolerance, COP, and POP: A Backdrop for Examining the Safer Cities Initiative**

#### *Zero Tolerance*

A considerable amount of research has examined zero-tolerance policing, community policing, and problem-oriented policing, and that research serves as an important backdrop for examining the SCI. Let us start with zero-tolerance policing, which is perhaps the antithesis of peacekeeping. The most cited example of zero-tolerance policing occurred in New York City during the mid-1990s, when William Bratton was Commissioner of the New York Police Department (NYPD).<sup>5</sup> The initiation of this zero-tolerance approach coincided with a sharp decrease in crime, mostly notably a 60% drop in homicides, as well as significant declines in social and physical disorder (New York City Mayor's Office, 1998).<sup>6</sup> Although Bratton (1998) argued that police were responsible for the drop in crime, others have pointed to demographic shifts, economic factors, changing drug market patterns, and increasing incarceration rates as the primary causal factors (Harcourt, 1998; Rosenfeld, Fornango, and Rengifo, 2007; Travis, 1998; Zimring and Hawkins, 1997).

The zero-tolerance/crime-reduction debate in New York City exceeds the scope of this essay, but larger questions have emerged surrounding the strategy that are of central concern to the LAPD's SCI. Both Dixon (2005) and Sherman (1998) highlighted the impact of zero

4. Little detail is provided in Berk and MacDonald (2010) that provides any insight as to whether the officers assigned to Los Angeles' Skid Row, or the SCI, use Bittner's (1967) principles (or possess Muir's [1977] passion and perspective). The brief descriptions of the tactics employed in the SCI certainly do not seem consistent with Bittner's work, however.
5. With broken windows theory as a theoretical framework, in 1994, the NYPD began focusing its efforts on "graffiti, aggressive panhandling, fare beating, public drunkenness, unlicensed vending, public drinking, public urination and other misdemeanor offenses" (New York Police Department, 1994: 1). See also Katz, Webb, and Schaefer's (2001) study of zero-tolerance policing in Chandler, Arizona. The authors reported a significant reduction in the level of disorder and minor offenses but no clear impact on more serious crime.
6. The focus on low-level crimes occurred in conjunction with a focus on removing guns from the street and organizational shifts associated with CompStat.

tolerance on jail/prison populations and suggested that the strategy actually might have criminogenic effects through the consequences of mass arrest practices on the labor market. Also, the NYPD's primary tactic was, and still is, aggressive stop, question, and frisks of pedestrians. Fagan and Davies (2000) concluded that the stop-and-frisk activities were focused disproportionately on the poorest neighborhoods with the greatest number of minority residents, even after controlling for rates of disorder and crime. Fagan, Geller, Davies, and West (2010: 310) later argued that the NYPD tactics "had become a flashpoint for grievances by the City's minority communities." The undercurrent of tension among police and residents of the city's poorest neighborhoods has manifested itself in several ways, including a 75% increase in civil rights claims against police and a 60% increase in the number of civilian complaints (from 1992 to 1996; Greene, 1999).<sup>7</sup>

The New York City experience also raises concerns about police legitimacy (Kane, 2005; Tyler, 2006; Tyler and Huo, 2002). Deficiencies in legitimacy can threaten the core functioning of police, as citizens are less likely to call the police to report a crime or suspicious activity, are less likely to provide the police with information, and might be more likely to act defiantly and disobey the law (Sherman, 1993, 1998; Tyler, 2006). Greene (1999) argued that the increases in complaints and civil suits against police in New York City reflect the costs of the zero-tolerance approach, and she noted that San Diego experienced similar crime declines with a community-oriented policing approach that used "more efficient and humane methods."

Coming back to Muir (1977), we can consider the experiences surrounding zero-tolerance policing through his framework and his taxonomy of police officers. These experiences seem to reflect a shift away from Muir's professional police model in which officers possess both passion and perspective. The spikes in complaints and civil rights lawsuits are evidence of this trend. It seems reasonable to suggest then that the zero-tolerance approach might promote the development of enforcers, the category of nonprofessional officers who morally are reconciled with the use of coercive authority but who lack empathy and an understanding of the tragic human condition.

### *COP and POP*

Although space constraints prohibit a full review of the research examining POP and COP, considerable empirical support has developed for problem-solving approaches (Diamond, 1993; Eck, 1992; Eck and Spelman, 1987; Green-Mazerolle, Ready, Terrill, and Waring, 1999; Kennedy, 1997; Kenney and Watson, 1992; Police Executive Research Forum, 1993; Reitzel, Piquero, and Piquero, 2005; Sherman, 1989; White, Fyfe, Campbell, and Goldkamp, 2003).<sup>8</sup> The research

- 
7. During testimony before the City Council in 1997, New York City Public Advocate Mark Green stated that the torture of Abner Louima was part of a larger "pattern of police abuse, brutality, and misconduct" that the department and the Mayor's office had failed to address and that "the problem of police misconduct is disproportionately concentrated in New York City's high crime minority neighborhoods" (Green, 1997).
  8. Because the recognition of the relationship between crime and place is a core feature of problem-oriented policing, the literature on place-based policing initiatives is also relevant (Braga, 2001; Sherman, Gartin, and Buerger, 1989; Weisburd and Eck, 2004; Weisburd, Wyckoff, Ready, Eck, Hinkle, and Gajewski, 2006).

on community policing is less compelling, although clear examples exist of its positive impact (Cordner, 2005; Greene, 1999; Skogan and Hartnett, 1997). Perhaps most important is that the key elements of peacekeeping—the central feature of good craftsmanship on Skid Row—are entirely consistent with both community- and problem-oriented policing. The conceptual links between the early principles of craftsmanship and COP and POP today are demonstrated more clearly if we again draw on Bittner's (1967) and Muir's (1977) conceptions of good policing. At the time they were conducting their research, Bittner's skills for effective policing on Skid Row and Muir's passion/perspective capacities were viewed as idiosyncratic among police. However, these abilities are implicit in COP and POP, and the institutionalization of these strategies in American policing has served to codify the skills necessary to become one of Bittner and Muir's craftsman. This skill set includes strong relationships with the community, maintaining informal social controls, intimate knowledge of people and places, empathy, a deemphasis on formal interventions, and problem solving. In many ways, Officer Marshall's craftsmanship on Skid Row represents the core principles of both COP and POP. And officers well versed in COP and POP today probably bear a remarkable resemblance to Officer Marshall.

### *POP and Homeless Encampments*

In January 2010, the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing issued a problem-specific guide (#56 in the series) on policing homeless encampments (Chamard, 2010). The guide describes general principles for an effective strategy, which are aligned closely with the previous discussions of peacekeeping, passion, and perspective. And most relevant for the LAPD's SCI, the guide offers a multistage plan for shutting down homeless encampments (Chamard, 2010).<sup>9</sup> The Fort Lauderdale model demonstrates the strategy espoused by the POP guide. The model is based on the understanding that the "homeless are not problem people but rather people with problems," and it involves developing partnerships with homeless agencies, changing department policy to limit arrests of homeless for minor nuisance crimes, changing officer attitudes, and creating outreach teams comprising officers and homeless volunteers (Fort Lauderdale Police Department, 2002). This model is entirely consistent with Muir's passion and perspective criteria and demonstrates the operationalization of those early principles in today's problem-solving strategies. Last, the POP guide offers insights on law-enforcement practices that have limited effectiveness, and initiatives like the LAPD's SCI are targeted specifically as follows:

One common strategy is the "bum sweep," where police temporarily concentrate resources in a troubled area and arrest a lot of homeless people for minor offenses or on outstanding warrants. Sweeps can clean up an area very quickly, but they are not generally effective for a number of reasons. First, they can create an adversarial

---

9. The POP guide is based on homeless programs created by police departments from across the United States, including Clearwater (FL), Fort Lauderdale (FL), San Diego (CA), Anchorage (AK), Cincinnati (OH), Newport Beach (CA), and Reno (NV) (Chamard, 2010).

relationship between this group and the police, and second, they can encourage unproductive interaction with homeless advocates. Finally there is no evidence that sweeps have any long-term effect. As an isolated response, crackdowns against the street homeless are not advised. (Chamard, 2010: 35)

### **Final Thoughts on the Craftsmanship of the LAPD's SCI**

This essay sought to answer a relatively simple question: Does the SCI represent good policing? Several key points were raised while exploring this question. First, the mandate of the police is exceptionally broad, and peacekeeping is a central and important feature of everyday police business. Second, for some time now, we have known a good deal about effective policing with the homeless, and peacekeeping is at the core of what works on Skid Row. Bittner (1967) laid out these principles, and Muir (1977) incorporated them into a larger theory of good policing. Importantly, Muir (1977) offered a guiding framework for professional policing on Skid Row, with passion and perspective as the defining elements, and Officer Mike Marshall demonstrated these elements in practice.

Third, I have argued that these core principles of craftsmanship are central features of community- and problem-oriented policing, and both the widespread adoption of COP/POP and the body of research supporting their effectiveness has served to institutionalize these principles. Moreover, this research demonstrates that viable alternatives to SCI-like strategies can achieve measurable reductions in crime without generating the steep costs described earlier. These police-led programs reflect the spirit of Bittner's (1967) and Muir's (1977) principles—with the decriminalization and reduction of homelessness as central goals—and the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing *Homeless Encampment Guide* (Chamard, 2010) offers a road map for implementing such initiatives.

Fourth, when considering zero-tolerance approaches like the LAPD's SCI, one must account for the costs associated with the strategy and determine whether those costs outweigh the benefits. The benefits are detailed in Berk and MacDonald (2010) and include reductions in crime and disorder.<sup>10</sup> But what are the costs? Berk and MacDonald (2010) admittedly do not address this issue. The New York City experience offers some insights into the costs of zero tolerance, which have included increases in citizen complaints and civil rights lawsuits, low reserves of police legitimacy and ongoing tension with minority communities, and even

---

10. Some evidence also indicates that the number of homeless on Skid Row has dropped (by 38% from 2007 to 2009), although this is contested vigorously by many homeless advocates (DiMassa, 2009). The degree to which a decrease in the number of homeless has occurred, and whether the SCI played a role in that decrease, remains unclear.

allegations of police misconduct (Green, 1997).<sup>11</sup> In Muir's (1977) terms, the costs would seem to suggest that officers who employ zero-tolerance tactics are at risk of losing their perspective and becoming enforcers. If this is indeed the case—and I believe it is—then the adoption of zero-tolerance strategies represents a step away from professional policing.

Last, the costs of zero tolerance might be most severe when applied to the chronically homeless because of their disproportionate vulnerability. The homeless face multiple risk factors that have a range of public policy and behavioral health implications. The homeless are more likely to be impacted by serious medical illnesses such as tuberculosis, HIV, and other diseases. They also suffer from disproportionate rates of mental illness and substance-abuse problems (25% and 33%, respectively, on Los Angeles' Skid Row, according to Berk and MacDonald [2010]).<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the residents of Skid Row have even less visibility than the urban poor who are the traditional targets of zero tolerance. They are unlikely to seek out the police for assistance when they are victimized. They are unlikely to file citizen complaints or civil rights lawsuits if they feel they have been mistreated. And they are unlikely to unite and generate political capital that will allow their voices to be heard. All of these concerns brings us back to the original question of whether the LAPD's SCI is good policing. What if this question was posed to Bittner's (1967) cops and Muir's (1977) Mike Marshall? What would they say about the SCI? I think they would say that the SCI is "poor craft," and my conclusion is the same.

### Implications for Good Policing on Skid Row

The evidence supporting this "poor craft" conclusion also has implications for effective policing on Skid Row. These implications are philosophical, strategic, and operational, and although they are implicit throughout the essay, they are important enough to warrant special attention. First, good policing on Skid Row begins with a philosophical recognition that homelessness is not a crime. This acknowledgment is not to say that crimes committed by the homeless are not serious or do not deserve police attention; they certainly do. Rather, the principles of good policing on Skid Row center on peacekeeping and Muir's (1977) passion and perspective, and these principles cannot be sustained while officers are issuing fines and citations and enforcing sidewalk ordinances (i.e., zero tolerance). In plain terms, organizational rejection of the "homelessness-is-a-crime" philosophy is an essential first step to good policing on Skid Row.

- 
11. At least some indications of similar problems have emerged recently in Los Angeles. For example, in June 2008, an editorial by Welch, Blasi, and Dear (2008) alleged that Los Angeles "respect for the civil liberties of homeless people remains disgraceful," citing more than 18,000 arrests under the SCI and failure to deliver social services to those in need on Skid Row. In September 2009, protests by homeless activists temporarily disrupted a Los Angeles City Council meeting, and representatives from the Los Angeles Community Action Network testified at the meeting about the SCI and police harassment of Skid Row residents (Zahniser, 2009).
  12. Moreover, given the gradual cessation of combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and the current economic recession, the homeless in Los Angeles and elsewhere likely will include growing proportions of returning military veterans and families (at least 20% in 2009 already, according to Berk and MacDonald [2010]).



Second, although homelessness itself is not a crime, the reduction of crime on Skid Row is still a critical and legitimate police goal. The important strategic question for the police is how best to achieve that goal, and the answer is through a mix of community- and problem-oriented strategies in combination with peacekeeping. The POP Center Guide (Chamard, 2010) offers clear lessons on how to accomplish this goal. Importantly, the specific strategies for effective policing on Skid Row might vary somewhat across jurisdictions based on the nature of the problem, resident and business owner demands, the local political culture, and the resources of the department. But the underlying principles of good craftsmanship will not change. To draw on Muir's (1977) officers again, Mike Marshall is a professional police officer, and Jim Longstreet and Bee Haywood are not. That assessment is a constant regardless of who employs them.

Last, on an operational level, the important question for police is how to deploy officers on Skid Row who have passion and perspective. Clear implications exist for recruitment and selection in terms of what departments should look for in their job candidates, as passion and perspective are qualities that some inherently possess. But training and officer assignment also have implications because passion and perspective can be taught. The critical issue for the police then becomes how to instill those qualities in all their officers. Although the task might seem daunting, the police have had success in the past with equally complex problems (e.g., the Memphis Police Department Crisis Intervention Team model for responding to the mentally ill), and the POP Center Guide again serves as an important resource. In simple terms, it is unreasonable to think that a department only will hire officers like Mike Marshall, although they are no doubt out there and departments should work hard to find them. It is more reasonable to demand that a police department work hard to create officers like Mike Marshall through proper training and guidance. Once this operational objective has been accomplished—and coupled with the philosophical and strategic principles outlined in this essay—good policing on Skid Row can be achieved.

## References

- Berk, Richard and John MacDonald. 2010. Policing the homeless: An evaluation of efforts to reduce homeless-related crime. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.
- Banton, Michael. 1964. *The Policeman in the Community*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bayley, David. 1994. *Police for the Future*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bittner, Egon. 1967. The police on skid row: A study of peace keeping. *American Sociological Review*, 32: 699–715.
- Bittner, Egon. 1974. Florence Nightingale in pursuit of Willie Sutton: A theory of the police. In (Herbert Jacob, ed.), *Potential for Reform of Criminal Justice*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Braga, Anthony A. 2001. The effects of hot spots policing on crime. *Annals of the American Academy*, 578: 104–125.
- Bratton, William. 1998. Crime is down: Blame the police. In (Norman Dennis, ed.), *Zero Tolerance: Policing a Free Society*. London, U.K.: Institute of Economic Affairs.

- Chamard, Sharon. 2010. *Homeless Encampments*. Problem-specific guide series no. 56. Washington, DC: Center for Problem-Oriented Policing.
- Cordner, Gary. 2005. Community policing: Elements and effects. In (Roger G. Dunham and Geoffrey Alpert, eds.), *Critical Issues in Policing*, 5th Edition. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.
- Diamond, Drew. 1993. *Community Policing and Regional Training for Small and Rural Jurisdictions*. Washington, DC: Police Executive Research Forum.
- DiMassa, Cara Mia. 2009. Backlash over report showing big drop in LA's homeless population. *Los Angeles Times*. November 11.
- Dixon, David. 2005. Beyond zero tolerance. In (Tim Newburn, ed.), *Police: Key Readings*. Portland, OR: Willan.
- Eck, John E. 1992. *Police and Drug Control*. Washington, DC: Police Executive Research Forum.
- Eck, John E. and William Spelman. 1987. *Problem-Solving: Problem-Oriented Policing in Newport News*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.
- Fagan, Jeffrey A. and Garth Davies. 2000. Street stops and broken windows: Terry, race, and disorder in New York City. *Fordham Urban Law Journal*, 28: 457–504.
- Fagan, Jeffrey A., Amanda Geller, Garth Davies, and Valerie West. 2010. Street stops and broken windows revisited: The demography and logic of proactive policing in a safe and changing city. In (Stephen Rice and Michael D. White, eds.), *Race, Ethnicity and Policing: New and Essential Readings*. New York: New York University Press.
- Fort Lauderdale Police Department. 2002. *Police Response to the Homeless: The Fort Lauderdale Model*. Washington, DC: Center for Problem-Oriented Policing.
- Green, Mark. 1997. *Testimony of the Public Advocate before the New York City Council Committee on Public Safety*. New York: New York City Council.
- Greene, Jack and Carl Klockars. 1991. What police do. In (Carl Klockars and Stephen Mastofski, eds.), *Thinking About Police: Contemporary Readings*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Greene, Judith A. 1999. Zero tolerance: A case study of police policies and practices in New York City. *Crime & Delinquency*, 45: 171–187.
- Green-Mazerolle, Lorraine, Justin Ready, William Terrill, and Elin Waring. 1999. Problem-oriented policing in public housing: The Jersey City evaluation. *Justice Quarterly*, 17: 129–155.
- Harcourt, Bernard E. 1998. Reflecting on the subject: A critique of the social influence conception of deterrence, the broken windows theory, and order-maintenance policing New York style. *Michigan Law Review*, 97: 291–389.
- Kane, Robert J. 2005. Compromised police legitimacy as a predictor of violent crime in structurally disadvantaged communities. *Criminology*, 43: 469–498.
- Katz, Charles M., Vincent J. Webb, and David R. Schaefer. 2001. An assessment of the impact of quality-of-life policing on crime and disorder. *Justice Quarterly*, 18: 825–877.
- Kennedy, David. 1997. *Juvenile Gun Violence and Gun Markets in Boston*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.

- Kenney, Dennis and Steuart Watson. 1992. *Crime in the Schools: Reducing Fear and Disorder with Student Problem Solving*. Washington, DC: Police Executive Research Forum.
- Manning, Peter K. 1978. The police: Mandate, strategies, and appearances. In (Peter K. Manning and John Van Maanen, eds.), *Policing: A View from the Street*. New York: Random House.
- Mastrofski, Stephen. 1983. The police and noncrime services. In (Gordon Whitaker and Charles Phillips, eds.), *Evaluating the Performance of Criminal Justice Agencies*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Muir, William Ker, Jr. 1977. *Police: Streetcorner Politicians*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- New York City Mayor's Office. 1998. *The Mayor's Management Report: Preliminary Fiscal 1998 Summary Volume*. New York: Mayor's Office of Operations.
- New York City Police Department. 1994. *Reclaiming the Public Spaces of New York*. Police Strategy No. 5. New York: Author.
- Police Executive Research Forum. 1993. *Comprehensive Gang Initiative: Operations Manual for Implementing Local Gang Prevention and Control Programs*. Washington, DC: Police Executive Research Forum.
- Reitzel, John D., Nicole Leeper Piquero, and Alex R. Piquero. 2005. Problem-oriented policing. In (Roger G. Dunham and Geoffrey Alpert, eds.), *Critical Issues in Policing*, 5th Edition. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.
- Rosenfeld, Richard, Robert Fornango, and Andres F. Rengifo. 2007. The impact of order-maintenance policing on New York City homicide and robbery rates, 1998–2001. *Criminology*, 45: 355–384.
- Scott, Eric J. 1981. *Calls for Service: Citizen Demand and Initial Police Response*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Sherman, Lawrence. 1989. Repeat calls for service: Policing the “hot spots.” In (Dennis Kenney, ed.), *Police and Policing: Contemporary Issues*. New York: Praeger.
- Sherman, Lawrence. 1993. Defiance, deterrence, and irrelevance: A theory of the criminal sanction. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 30: 445–473.
- Sherman, Lawrence. 1998. Policing for crime prevention. In (Lawrence Sherman, Denise C. Gottfredson, Doris L. MacKenzie, John E. Eck, Peter Reuter, and Shawn D. Bushway, eds.), *Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn't, What's Promising*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.
- Sherman, Lawrence, Patrick R. Gartin, and Michael E. Buerger. 1989. Hot spots of predatory crime: Routine activities and the criminology of place. *Criminology*, 27: 27–55.
- Skogan, Wesley G. and Susan M. Hartnett. 1997. *Community Policing, Chicago Style*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Travis, Jeremy. 1998, March 9. *Declining Crime and our National Research Agenda*. Inaugural lecture, John Jay College, New York.
- Tyler, Tom R. 2006. *Why People Obey the Law*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Tyler, Tom R. and Yuen Huo. 2002. *Trust in the Law*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

- Weisburd, David and John E. Eck. 2004. What can police do to reduce crime, disorder and fear? *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 593: 42–65.
- Weisburd, David, Laura A. Wyckoff, Justin Ready, John E. Eck, Joshua C. Hinkle, and Frank Gajewski. 2006. Does crime just move around the corner? A controlled study of spatial displacement and diffusion of crime control benefits. *Criminology*, 44: 549–592.
- Westley, William. 1970. *Violence and the Police*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- White, Michael D., James J. Fyfe, Suzanne P. Campbell, and John S. Goldkamp. 2003. The police role in preventing homicide: Considering the impact of problem-oriented policing on the prevalence of murder. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 40: 194–225.
- Wilson, James Q. 1968. *Varieties of Police Behavior*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wolch, Jennifer, Gary Blasi, and Michael Dear. 2008. LA homeless: A progress report. *Los Angeles Times*. June 22.
- Zahniser, David. 2009. Protest by homeless activists stop LA City Council Meeting. *Los Angeles Times*. September 29.
- Zimring, Frank E. and Gordon Hawkins. 1997. *Crime is Not the Problem: Lethal Violence in America*. New York: Oxford University Press.

---

**Michael D. White** is an associate professor in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Arizona State University. Professor White's primary research interests involve the police, including use of force, training, and misconduct. His recent work has been published in *Criminology & Public Policy*, *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, and *Crime & Delinquency*.







