

SOCIOLOGY OF CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Syllabus

This course is organized around three general topics: (1) the social production and organization of crime, (2) the role of police and other official actors in managing criminality, and (3) the punishment of criminals. Under each topic, we will bring a sociological perspective to bear on important policy debates. Crosscutting all of these topics, we will attend to the role of racial and class inequality in the production of crime and the criminal justice process.

Requirements: Do the readings, think critically, and participate in class discussions. There will be a midterm (short answers, worth 40%) and a final exam (short answer and essay, worth 60%). Both exams are in take-home format.

Readings: All readings listed below are required. There are two books that you should order immediately from Amazon or the publishers:

- John Hagan. 1994. *Crime and Disrepute*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge.
- Michael Tonry. 1995. *Malign Neglect—Race, Crime, and Punishment in America*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Other readings are available for download. The reading load is fairly heavy, about 100-150 pages per week; much of the material is fairly technical, requiring careful attention to data in the form of graphics and tables.

Week 1 Jan 8 Introductions and Conceptual Framework: What is crime?

Week 2 Jan. 15 Crime, Crime Rates, and Crime Trends

Crime is a slippery concept, and whether you think crime is increasing or decreasing depends in part on how it is defined and counted. Our task this week is to learn about different sources of data on crime, and to figure out what they tell us about recent patterns of criminal activity in the U.S.

Hagan, *Crime and Disrepute*, ch. 1

Scott Boggess and John Bound. 1997. "Did Criminal Activity Increase During the 1980s? Comparison Across Data Sources." *Social Science Quarterly* 78:725-39.

Michael R. Rand and Callie M. Rennison. 2002. "True Crime Stories? Accounting for Differences in Our National Crime Indicators." *Chance* 15:47-51.

Alfred Blumstein. 2000. "Disaggregating the Violence Trends." Pp. 13-44 in *The Crime Drop in America*, edited by A. Blumstein and J. Wallman.

Richard Rosenfeld. 2002. "Crime Decline in Context." *Contexts* 1:25-34.

Week 3 Jan. 22 Crime and the Life Course

One of the most fundamental insights to come out of criminological research is the relationship between age and crime. Is the “age-crime curve” a universal phenomenon, or does it vary across social contexts? What are the implications of this issue for sociological explanations of crime?

Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi. 1990. *A General Theory of Crime* ch. 6, “Criminal Events and Individual Propensities: Age, Gender, and Race”

Marcus Felson. 1998. *Crime and Everyday Life* ch. 5, “Out-of-Synch Youth”

John H. Laub and Robert J. Sampson. 1993. “Turning Points in the Life Course: Why Change Matters to the Study of Crime.” *Criminology* 31:301-325.

Week 4 Jan. 29 Crime and Inequality: Social Class

For hundreds of years, poverty, unemployment, and homelessness have been linked to criminality, but among criminologists the exact nature of the class-crime relationship remains a matter of controversy. Three questions will preoccupy us this week: What does the research literature tell us about the relationship between social class and crime? If there is an association, what does it mean? What are the implications of this research for crime-control policy?

Hagan, *Crime and Disrepute*, ch. 3

John Hagan and Bill McCarthy. 1997. *Mean Streets: Youth Crime and Homelessness*: ch. 2, “Street Youth and Street Settings”

William Julius Wilson. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*: ch. 2, “Social Change and Social Dislocations in the Inner City”

Week 5 Feb. 5 Crime and Inequality: Race

In the U.S., official data suggest that African-Americans and Latinos are more likely than others to commit crimes and get arrested. How can this connection be explained? This week we will review the empirical evidence on the relationship between race and crime, and examine a variety of explanations for this link.

Michael Hindelang. 1978. “Race and Involvement in Common Law Personal Crimes.” *American Sociological Review* 43:93-109.

James Q. Wilson and Richard J. Herrnstein. 1985. *Crime and Human Nature*. New York: Simon and Schuster, ch. 18 pp. 459-486

Robert J. Sampson and William Julius Wilson. 1995. "Toward a Theory of Race, Crime, and Urban Inequality." Pp. 37-54 in *Crime and Inequality*, edited by J. Hagan and R. D. Peterson. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Week 6 Feb. 12 Courts and Sentencing

A great deal of sociological research has been motivated by the suspicion that the criminal justice system is biased against minorities and the poor. This week we will review this research in the context of the organizational structure of courts and recent legal reforms that have sought to limit the discretionary authority of prosecutors and judges.

Lisa Frohmann. 1997. "Convictability and Discordant Locales: Reproducing Race, Class, and Gender Ideologies in Prosecutorial Decisionmaking." *Law and Society Review* 31:531-555.

Marc Mauer. 1999. *Race to Incarcerate*. New York: The New Press, ch. 7 pp. 118-141.

Michael Tonry, *Malign Neglect*, pp. 1-80.

Cassia C. Spohn. 1996. "Courts, Sentences, and Prisons." Pp. 247-268 in *An American Dilemma Revisited: Race Relations in a Changing World*, edited by O. Clayton, Jr. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Week 7 Feb. 19 Prisons and the Trend Toward Mass Incarceration

Since the mid-1970s, the rate of incarceration in the U.S. has multiplied fivefold, and poor African-Americans and Latinos make up an increasingly large share of the prison population. What accounts for these trends?

Michael Tonry. 1999. "Why are US Incarceration Rates So High?" *Crime & Delinquency* 45:419-437.

Katherine Beckett and Theodore Sasson. 2000. *The Politics of Injustice: Crime and Punishment in America*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge, ch. 4 pp. 47-74.

Alfred Blumstein. 2002. "Prisons: A Policy Challenge." Pp. 451-482 in *Crime: Public Policies for Crime Control*, edited by J. Q. Wilson and J. Petersilia. Oakland, CA: Institute for Contemporary Studies.

California Blue Ribbon Commission on Inmate Population Management. 1990. Final Report: Introduction (pp. 1-7), Factors Contributing to Prison and Jail Overcrowding (pp. 23-29)

Week 8 Feb. 26 The War on Drugs

Changes in drug-control policies have powerfully influenced the growth of incarceration in the U.S. How and why have these policy changes occurred? What have been the effects of the war on drugs?

Hagan, *Crime and Disrepute*, ch. 5 pp. 154-168

Tonry, *Malign Neglect*, pp. 81-209

Wilson, James Q. 1990. "Against the Legalization of Drugs." *Commentary*, February, pp. 21-28.

Week 9 March 5 The Impact of Mass Incarceration

Proponents of "get-tough" penal policies have argued that the threat of imprisonment deters potential criminals, or at least that it incapacitates the most dangerous offenders. We will evaluate these arguments, and consider other impacts of incarceration on convicts, their families, and their communities.

Elijah Anderson. 2001. "Going Straight: The Story of a Young Inner-City Ex-Convict." *Punishment and Society* 3:135-152.

James Austin and John Irwin. 2001. *It's About Time: America's Imprisonment Binge*, ch. 10 pp. 219-252

Bruce Western, Becky Pettit, and Josh Guetzkow. 2002. "Black Economic Progress in the Era of Mass Imprisonment," pp. 165-180 in Marc Mauer and Meda Chesney-Lind (eds.), *Invisible Punishment*.

Todd R. Clear. 2002. "The Problem With 'Addition by Subtraction': The Prison-Crime Relationship in Low-Income Communities," pp. 181-193 in Marc Mauer and Meda Chesney-Lind (eds.), *Invisible Punishment*.

Matthew Heller, "Delano's Grand Illusion," *Los Angeles Times* Sept. 1, 2002.

Scott Duke Harris, "Listening to Oakland," *Los Angeles Times* June 6, 2003.

Christopher Uggen and Jeff Manza. 2002. "Democratic Contraction? Political Consequences of Felon Disenfranchisement in the United States." *American Sociological Review* 67: 777-803.

Week 10 March 12 The Death Penalty

The United States stands out as the only industrialized democracy that executes criminals for civil crimes. What makes the U.S. unique in this way? Is the use of the death penalty influenced by reason and fairness, as the Supreme Court has required, by racial and class bias, or simply by capriciousness? What goals is capital punishment supposed to serve, and how well does it serve them?

James Berry. 1892. *My Experiences as an Executioner*. London: Percy Lund & Co., ch. 4, "My Method of Execution," & 6, "Two Terrible Experiences".

Marshall Frady. 1993. "Death in Arkansas." *New Yorker*, February 22, pp. 105-133.

William C. Bailey and Ruth D. Peterson. 1999. "Capital Punishment, Homicide, and Deterrence: An Assessment of the Evidence." Pp. 223-245 in *Studying and Preventing Homicide: Issues and Challenges*, edited by M. D. Smith and M. A. Zahn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Jeffery L. Johnson and Colleen F. Johnson. 2001. "Poverty and the Death Penalty." *Journal of Economic Issues* 35:517-523.

Samuel Walker, Cassia Spohn, and Miriam DeLone. 2004. "The Color of Death: Race and the Death Penalty." Ch. 8 in *The Color of Justice: Race, Ethnicity, and Crime in America*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.