

Book Review

Reiner, Robert 2007. *Law and Order: An Honest Citizen's Guide to Crime Control*. London: Polity Press.

252 pp, Paperback \$19.95 (US). ISBN-10:0745629970

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This somewhat eccentric and short book from Robert Reiner, a well-regarded British policing academic, is supposed to be a contemporary (British) version of the 1970 American book *An Honest Politician's Guide to Crime Control*. Reiner's book is an attempt to provide an accessible analysis of the current political economy of crime and crime control in Britain. The book's main thesis is that the recent rise in crime and the subsequent conservative turn to "law and order" are the result of neoliberal politics and policies. Reiner's old school, critical criminology analysis focuses on the political and economic nature of current public crime and order problems and politically manufactured criminal justice responses. Reiner argues that the more equitable welfare state model of the 1970's created less crime and that subsequent neoliberal economic and social policies created increased inequality, individualism and a consumer-based culture with antisocial values. This combination of structural and cultural factors has led to a predictable increase in violent crime but one exaggerated by a sensationalist corporate media and a limited reactionary crime control response.

More specifically in Chapter 1, the author suggests that contemporary law and order politics in Britain requires an understanding of neo-liberalism as a context for analysis of the basic social and economic causes of crime. Reiner adds culture to the causal mix by salvaging Merton's anomie theories and the disjuncture between cultural goals and opportunity. This he sees as particularly relevant in a neoliberal consumer based culture where amplified materialistic aspirations are both unrealistic and unattainable. Chapter 2; explores "crime" as a social, political and normative construct. Chapter 3 describes and critiques how we "measure" crime and crime trends and provides a description of how crimes are officially defined, tabulated, displayed and interpreted. Despite these limitations Reiner then uses conventional crime data to describe and explain historical crime trends in Britain from the 1950's to the current era, linking variation in crime rates to different stages of political and economic development in Britain. Chapter 4 contains the central argument of the book. Rejecting conventional permissiveness ("it was the 60s") arguments, Reiner does a quick tour of conventional criminology theories and proposes some key criminological conditions for crime such as: labelling, motivation means and opportunity and control. He then describes how these various causal factors are affected by a changing political economy. Chapter 5 uses this expanded political economy framework to explain recent law and order politics and the emergence of a neoliberal political economy and related social and cultural changes such as the emergence of a consumer culture, increasing social inequality and the exclusion and the destruction of the "social." Reiner suggests that being tough on crime without being tough on the causes of crime simply reinforce the social and political construction of crime without addressing its basic causes. Reiner's somewhat predictable conclusion is to advocate a move away from neoliberal law and order politics and policies and return to a social democratic society and politic capable of addressing the root social and economic causes of crime.

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In summary this book is on one hand an ambitious primer on the current “crime and crime control problem” it is, on the other hand, meant also to be read as a kind of beginners citizen’s guide to critical criminological thinking. For most students or faculty with a criminology background much of this book and its analysis will be familiar but nevertheless useful, but for real citizens or new students the book covers an awful lot of ground in a very short space. While it's tempting to argue that you can reduce most criminology theory and research to a handful of succinct concepts and a few graphs, you get the feeling that at times you are getting far too little information and explanation for such sweeping analysis and conclusions. The neoliberal critique provides a predictable but insightful critical criminology take on the issues of modern crime and crime control. Not so predictable is Reiner's acceptance that violent crime increases are real, not just political constructions. He does a good job explaining how neoliberal policies undermine the stability and constraints of working class, family and community and create instead a consumer based culture that encourages the fundamentally anti-societal values of individualism, hedonism and violence.

In summary *Law and Order* is an unusual but insightful book from an author who's been around long enough to critically comment with authority on the recent evolution of modern crime and crime control. While it's hard to imagine many average citizens, especially North American, actually buying and reading this book, it is well worth a look for those of us who need to be occasionally reminded that explaining crime still is about the political economy, stupid!