

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, COLLEGE PARK

HONR 218W

*The Idea of Crime*

Spring 2019

**Professor John H. Laub**

Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice

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*Course Description:*

What (if anything) motivates an individual to commit acts of crime? Why is crime concentrated in a small number of communities? Why do some societies have high rates of crime and violence while others do not? What can the government do (if anything) to prevent and control crime? These questions have challenged and bedeviled social thinkers for centuries. Indeed, such big questions have no easy answers. This course seeks to engage students in a thoughtful, in-depth examination of the idea of crime. In this course, we will explore fundamental debates about the definition of crime, its nature, its explanation, and its control. Emphasis is placed on original readings and a critical appraisal of the major theoretical paradigms in the field of criminology. We will begin with controversies over the definition of crime and deviance. We then examine the nature of crime, including crime trends and patterns. Then we turn to different theories of crime and explore the underlying assumptions regarding human nature in the competing explanations and paradigms. For example, one major divide concerns theories that explain individual differences in crime rates versus those that explain societal or community-level differences. We will also explore the implications of criminological theory for understanding approaches to the prevention and control of crime.

*Required Readings:*

Joseph E. Jacoby, Theresa A. Severance, and Alan S. Bruce (editors). 2012. Classics of Criminology (4<sup>th</sup> Edition). Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press

Patrick Sharkey. 2018. Uneasy Peace: The Great Crime Decline, The Renewal of City Life, and The Next War on Violence. New York: W.W. Norton.

John H. Laub and Robert J. Sampson. 2003. Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives: Delinquent Boys to Age 70. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Fox Butterfield. 1995. All God's Children: The Bosket Family and the American Tradition of Violence. New York: Knopf.

The required books are a mix of classical and contemporary scholarship. The Jacoby volume contains a rich set of original sources, many of them foundational to the field of criminology and criminal justice. Please note that with a few exceptions, the numbers for the assigned readings in the course outline refer to *chapter* numbers, not pages.

### *Course Requirements:*

I will require a series of assignments that will strengthen your oral and written communication skills as well as enhance your critical reading, writing, and thinking.

During the semester I will require two reaction papers (three to five pages), a midterm examination (all essay questions), and a final paper (10 to 15 pages). All of these assignments require students to write critically about the issues relating to our understanding of criminal behavior.

The two reaction papers (three to five pages each) will consist of a critical assessment of the themes found in two of the required books. Reaction paper #1 will focus on Franklin Zimring's The City that Became Safe and Reaction paper #2 will focus on Gottfredson and Hirschi's A General Theory of Crime. These two papers will count for 15 percent each (30 percent total) of your final grade. More details regarding these reaction papers will be provided in class.

A mid-term examination will be given in class. This exam will count for 30 percent of the final grade. Please note that make-up exams are discouraged. In the event that an exam is missed (providing a legitimate and documented excuse [defined by University] plus notification to me prior to the exam), the exam must be made up within one week of the missed examination. More details regarding the specific exam format will be provided in class.

The final paper (10 to 15 pages) will focus on a critical evaluation of the theories of crime and punishment with reference to the empirical materials found in Fox Butterfield's book, All God's Children: The Bosket Family and the American Tradition of Violence. This paper will count for 30 percent of your final grade. More details regarding this final paper will be provided in class.

I expect students to come to class prepared to participate in class discussions of assigned materials. I will also ask specific students to serve as discussion leaders for particular classes. Class participation will count for 10 percent of your final grade. More details regarding this assignment will be provided in class.

### *Course Related Policies Statement*

Policies relevant to Undergraduate Courses are found here:

<http://ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html>. Topics that are addressed in these various policies include academic integrity, student and instructor conduct, accessibility and accommodations, attendance and excused absences, grades and appeals, copyright and intellectual property.

### *Academic Dishonesty and Honor Pledge:*

The University of Maryland, College Park has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity, administered by the Student Honor Council. This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit <http://www.shc.umd.edu>. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Any student suspected of academic dishonesty will be referred to the Honor Council.

To further exhibit your commitment to academic integrity, remember to sign the Honor Pledge on all examinations and assignments: *"I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this assignment/examination."*

*Religious Observances:*

The University System of Maryland policy provides that students should not be penalized because of observances of their religious beliefs. Students shall be given an opportunity, whenever feasible, to make up within a reasonable time any academic assignment that is missed due to individual participation in religious observances. It is the responsibility of the student to inform the instructor of any intended absences for religious observances in advance.

*Students with Disabilities:*

Any student with a documented disability who wishes to discuss academic accommodations, please contact me by February 11, 2019.

*Office Hours and Class Meeting Time and Location:*

Office hours are Monday and Tuesday mornings from 10:00 to 12:00. All other days and times are by appointment only.

This class meets on Monday, 2:00 to 4:30, in 2165E LeFrak Hall.

*Course Outline:*

January 28

*Introduction and Overview of the Course*

February 4

*Assumptions, Definitions, and Themes*

Classical school and positivism	J: 16, 17,
Legacy of the “criminal man”	J: 21, 22, 24, 25
“Normality” of crime; consensus?	J: 18
Cultural conflict	J: 29

February 11 and 18\*

*The Nature of Crime* (see also: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/>)

Crime patterns and trends	J: 7, 8
Victim-offender link	J: 5, 6
Getting caught	J: 58
Explaining crime trends	Sharkey

February 25

*Conceptions of Punishment*

Deterrence/incapacitation	J: 48, 61, 62
Rehabilitation	J: 72
Just deserts	J: 50
Restorative justice	J: 51, 52

\*First reaction paper due at the start of class

March 4

*Classic Sociological Theories of Crime*

Social disorganization

J: 4, 30

Differential association

J: 34, 35

Subcultural

J: 32, 15

**March 11**

**MID-TERM EXAMINATION**

**March 18**

**SPRING BREAK**

March 25

*Classic Sociological Theories of Crime continued*

Anomie/strain

J: 27, 31, 36, 28

Social control

J: 26, 38, 33,

April 1

*Classic Theories of Law and Societal Reaction*

Labeling and Phenomenology

J: 41-43, 14

Class conflict

J: 19, 20

White-collar crime

J: 3

Vagrancy

J: 54

Women and crime

J: 45

April 8

*Special Class: To Be Announced*

April, 15, 22\* and 29

*Modern Developments*

Life-course criminology

Laub and Sampson

Criminal careers and developmental criminology

J: 10, 12

Self-control theory

J: 40

Crime Prevention

J: 73

May 6 and 13

*A Case Study in American Violence*

Butterfield

**May 20**

**FINAL PAPERS DUE**

\*Second reaction paper due at the start of class