

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, COLLEGE PARK

HONR 218W

The Idea of Crime

Spring 2020

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 (4th 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 Patrick Sharkey's Uneasy Peace: The Great Crime Decline, The Renewal of City Life, and The Next War on Violence and Reaction paper #2 will focus on Laub and Sampson's Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives: Delinquent Boys to Age 70. 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 10, 2020.

Office Hours and Class Meeting Time and Location:

Office hours are Monday 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 27

Introduction and Overview of the Course

February 3

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 10 and 17*

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 24

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 2

Classic Sociological Theories of Crime

Social disorganization
Differential association
Subcultural

J: 4, 30
J: 34, 35
J: 32, 15

March 9

MID-TERM EXAMINATION

March 16

SPRING BREAK

March 23

Classic Sociological Theories of Crime continued

Anomie/strain
Social control

J: 27, 31, 36, 28
J: 26, 38, 33,

March 30

Classic Theories of Law and Societal Reaction

Labeling and Phenomenology
Class conflict
White-collar crime
Women and crime

J: 41-43, 14
J: 19, 20
J: 3
J: 45

April 6

Special Class: To Be Announced

April, 13, 20, and 27*

Modern Developments

Criminal careers and developmental criminology
Self-control theory
Crime Prevention and Crime Control
Life-course criminology

J: 10, 12
J: 40
J: 73
Laub and Sampson

May 4 and 11

A Case Study in American Violence

Butterfield

May 18

FINAL PAPERS DUE

*Second reaction paper due at the start of class

Note: If you have questions about citations of journals, books, and web sources, citation formats, plagiarism, and the like, please refer to A Pocket Style Manual by Diana Hacker or see me with questions.

Reaction Paper #1

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 Patrick Sharkey's Uneasy Peace. This paper is due at the start of class on February 17, 2020 and will count for 15 percent of your final grade.

Your assignment is to describe and critically assess the author's thesis. What is the author's central argument? What are the major strengths of the work? What are the major weaknesses? Evaluate the author's reasoning and the evidence. Are there gaps or unaddressed issues which should be considered? Support your assessment with specific examples drawn from the assigned readings.

Papers should be three to five pages long and must be typed (with one inch margins), page-numbered, reasonably spaced, and well organized (headings often help in this regard).

Reaction Paper #2

Reaction paper #2 will focus on Laub and Sampson's Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives. This paper is due at the start of class on April 27, 2020 and will count for 15 percent of your final grade.

Your assignment is to describe and critically assess the author's thesis. What is the author's central argument? What are the major strengths of the work? What are the major weaknesses? Evaluate the author's reasoning and the evidence. Are there gaps or unaddressed issues which should be considered? Support your assessment with specific examples drawn from the assigned readings.

Papers should be three to five pages long and must be typed (with one inch margins), page-numbered, reasonably spaced, and well organized (headings often help in this regard).

Final Paper

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. I am using Butterfield's book as a case study in American violence. This paper is due no later than 2:00 p.m. on May 18, 2020 and will count for 30 percent of your final grade. Early final submissions are welcome.

The final paper is an opportunity for you to illustrate that you have read the required readings, engaged with the course material, and can apply your understanding to the world. When writing this paper, keep in mind that you will be graded on your ability to draw on class materials and apply them to the topic under investigation.

Class Participation

I expect students to come to class prepared to participate in class discussions of the assigned materials. This includes actively participating in class discussion with your questions, insights, and ideas.

In addition, each student will serve as a discussion leader for a particular class. Each discussion leader will be required to circulate *three* discussion questions relating to the class readings for their assigned day. These discussion questions will be used by the discussion leader as an aid in promoting class discussion of the topic under investigation. The three questions are due the day before class (Sunday) no later than 2:00 p.m. Please send these questions to me at jlaub@umd.edu. I will distribute the questions to the rest of the class. This way everyone will have a chance to think about the questions beforehand and this should make for a lively class discussion.

Class participation will count for 10 percent of your final grade.