

THE LIFE COURSE OF CRIMINOLOGY IN THE UNITED STATES: THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CRIMINOLOGY 2003 PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS*

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The field of criminology lacks a sense of its own history. To rectify this situation, I apply the concepts and framework of the life-course perspective to the development of criminology as a discipline. Examining criminology in the United States over the last 100 years, I discuss three eras (or life-course phases), intellectual continuities and turning points in the field. My thesis is that if we knew our history, we would realize that ideas about crime matter. I offer a revised version on how to view criminology and in doing so address the theme of the 2003 annual meeting of the American Society of Criminology, "The Challenge of Practice, the Benefits of Theory."

The focus of my address is the life course of criminology in the United States. Rob Sampson and I have spent the last 17 years examining the life course of crime. What I want to do here is examine the life course of our discipline, criminology.¹ There is a "presentism" in our field that I find contrary to the spirit of a healthy, intellectually vibrant enterprise such as

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1. I am well aware that many criminologists make a sharp distinction between criminology and criminal justice. Using the classic definition of criminology from Edwin Sutherland, I see criminology as encompassing criminal justice as well as the sociology of law. "Criminology is the body of knowledge regarding ... the processes of making laws, of breaking laws, and of reacting toward the breaking of laws" (Sutherland and Cressey, 1955:3).

criminology. It seems to me “new” developments in our field are constantly offered in an environment characterized by a collective amnesia. As we enter the new millennium, we can rectify this by taking our past more seriously so that we will be better able to create our future.

David Garland has argued that “[The] failure of criminologists to reflect critically upon their own practice has meant that our knowledge of criminology’s development is inadequate” (1985:110). More broadly, Robert Jones has written, “For surely it is curious that, at the same time that modern sociologists struggle to expand their imaginations and thus to develop new ideas to account for the complexities of human behavior, there is nothing of which we are more ignorant than the nature of the process by which such ideas emerge, are received, grow, change and are eventually surpassed” (1977:311).² One possible title for this address (with apologies to former ASC President John Hagan) could be “The Poverty of Ahistorical Criminology” (see Hagan, 1992). I want to begin to correct this situation here by developing a comprehensive and systematic intellectual history of criminology in the United States using a life-course perspective as a framework.³

But that is not all. Apparently, Robert Merton was fond of an adage coined by A.N. Whitehead, “A science which hesitates to forget its founders is lost” (Sztompka, 1996:5). Thus I also want to look forward to the future of criminology. Auguste Comte offered the following insight,

The chronological order of historic epochs is not their philosophical order. In place of saying: the past, the present and the future, we should say the past, the future and the present. In truth it is only when we have conceived the future by aid of the past that we can with advantage revert to the present so as to seize its true character (as quoted in Levine, 1995:269).

The thesis I will present here is that if we knew our history, we would realize that ideas about crime matter. Drawing on our history as a discipline, I offer a revised version on how to view criminology, especially

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2. In a provocative book, *Chaos of Disciplines*, Andrew Abbott provides a general account of how knowledge actually changes in the social sciences. With respect to “scientific revolutions,” Abbott argues that “They make us know the same things in different ways, and their new knowledge seems to be in some way incommensurable with the old, precisely because it is achieved by a different route” (2001:32). In a sense, major changes in the social sciences are the result of “reshuffling of fractal distinctions” within fields of study. Abbott notes that “generational paradigms are the simplest form of fractal cycle” (2001:25).
 3. The focus on the United States is not a retro attempt to reintroduce a xenophobic or ethnocentric analysis of crime and criminal justice. Global criminology is being developed (see Karstedt, 2001) and I fully support such efforts. My focus on the United States is much more practical and frankly modest.

concerning the role of theory in policy. I revisit the challenge issued by James Q. Wilson to the field of criminology in the 1970s, namely, the claim that criminological theory is irrelevant in policy debates. Criminologists, for the most part, have failed to respond to Wilson's challenge and as a result, a significant opportunity for our field was lost. From my perspective, unlike Wilson and his proponents such as John DiIulio, I believe the future of criminological research and public policy *requires* a focus on theory.

When I entered the field as a graduate student in the 1970s, criminology was an exciting field because people were passionate about ideas.⁴ Today "career concerns" are center-stage in the field—for example, publication counts, citation counts, the amount of external funding generated, departmental rankings and so forth are the new measures of intellectual impact and scholarship. In sharp contrast, I want to recapture the spirit, the excitement, and the boldness of criminology in the 1970s by bringing ideas back into the forefront. So with this ambitious agenda let me begin.

THE LIFE COURSE OF CRIMINOLOGY

The motivation for this paper is to extend the concepts and framework of the life-course perspective and apply them to the development of criminology as a discipline. At the most general level, the life course may be conceptualized as "pathways through the age-differentiated life span" (Elder, 1985:17). Life-course theory and research focus on trajectories (long-term patterns) and transitions (short-term events) over time. A staple of life-course research is examining how events that occur early in life can shape later outcomes. Nevertheless, the interlocking nature of trajectories and transitions may generate turning points or a change in the life course (Elder, 1985:32). The major concepts from the life course include: a focus on continuity; change, especially turning points; age,

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4. One can ask in all seriousness, Why is so much of criminology today boring? For an interesting discussion of creativity, Saturday Night Live, and German philosophy I recommend Malcolm Gladwell's essay in *The New Yorker* (2002). Gladwell argues that throughout history innovative ideas result from intense group interactions. Supporting this idea, in an interview I did for my oral history of criminology, Albert Cohen described his fellow graduate students at Indiana University as "a tightly integrated group.... We lived and breathed sociology. We would go to lunch together and we would stay about two hours or more at lunch.... I have seen some things that approach that but never anything quite like that—of that degree of solidarity, intensity, and focus on sociology in a group of graduate students" (Laub, 1983:187). I suspect things are very different for contemporary graduate students in criminology.

period and cohort effects; and both internal and external forces that may shape life-course development.⁵

Recently, Glen Elder (1998) has identified four paradigmatic life-course principles in the study of lives. I use these principles as a framework for conceptualizing and ultimately understanding the life course of criminology.⁶

The first principle is that *The Life Course of Individuals Is Embedded in and Shaped by the Historical Times and Places They Experience Over Their Life Time*. This is evident in Elder's classic work, *Children of the Great Depression*, where he shows that historical change at the macro level can transform the developmental experience of children by altering primary relationships within the family and peer group (1999). As discussed below, in the history of criminology this principle suggests that context is central in understanding the trajectory of ideas about crime and justice.

The second principle is *The Developmental Impact of a Succession of Life Transitions or Events Is Contingent on When They Occur in a Person's Life*. Again, drawing on Elder's work, he showed that the Great Depression affected different cohorts differently. Younger cohorts were more severely affected than older (1999). With regard to the life course of criminology, this principle relates to the appeal of ideas at certain points in the life course. This may explain why there appears to be no such thing as a new idea, instead ideas that did not gain attention at one point in time are "rediscovered" at a later stage of development.

The third principle is that *Lives Are Lived Interdependently and Social and Historical Influences Are Expressed Through This Network of Shared Relationships*. There has been a longstanding focus on generations in life course and this principle reflects the importance of linked lives among family and friends over time (see, for example, Elder, Caspi and Downey, 1986). In criminology, there has been strong interest in interdependent relationships resulting from social networks—who did so and so study

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5. Joachim Savelsberg and Sarah Flood (2003) have examined how scholarly knowledge is produced in criminology taking into account period and cohort effects. Savelsberg and colleagues have also assessed the role of governmental funding on knowledge production in criminology and criminal justice (see Savelsberg, King and Cleveland, 2002 and Savelsberg, Cleveland and King, 2004).
 6. In his review of an earlier draft of this address, Travis Hirschi noted the ironic aspects of applying a life-course perspective to a discipline—"You are not, after all, saying that death is down the road for criminology" (personal communication, September 26, 2003). Let me be clear —I am not. The individual life-course model neglects such issues as schisms in the field and potential reorganization that may reshape and extend the life span of a discipline. For discussion of these issues see Abbott, 2001.

with? What other faculty are in your department? However, there has been little systematic study of the effects of these linked relationships on the intellectual development of criminology.

The fourth principle is that *Individuals Construct Their Own Life Course Through the Choices and Actions They Take Within the Opportunities and Constraints of History and Social Circumstances*. There is increasing evidence that one's life course is shaped in part by individual decisionmaking (see Clausen, 1993 and Laub and Sampson, 2003) and there is equally compelling evidence that criminology as we know it was shaped by the choices made by the intellectual leaders of the discipline. Criminology, like crime itself, is a human activity and in the end, there is no escape from human beings and their actions. Like any history, the history of criminology has its heroes and villains. Human agency is central to our understanding because history is not shaped by impersonal forces alone.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL COURSE OF CRIMINOLOGY

Throughout my career, I have asked myself what accounts for the intellectual trajectory of criminology? Why has our field developed the way that it has? Initially, I was drawn to the idea that personal history of those involved in the field, especially those considered pioneers in criminology, shaped its content and character. In order to test that notion, as a graduate student, I began a series of oral history interviews with some of those regarded to be the leaders in the field between the period of 1930 and 1960 (see Laub, 1983). Those interviewed included Hans Mattick, Leslie Wilkins, Dan Glaser, Thorsten Sellin, Donald Cressey, Sol Kobrin, Albert Cohen, Ed Lemert and Lloyd Ohlin. What I was struck by was that the connections between personal history and intellectual development of criminology were simultaneously profound and tenuous. Clearly one's early life experiences influenced opportunities for intellectual development and areas of inquiry if only by dictating the time and place of education. At the same time, for those that I interviewed the source of their ideas about crime was found in the academic discipline of sociology. I concluded that the development of criminology could be accounted for by a combination of personal history, internal developments—yes, there was some evidence of progressive lines of development based on accumulating research findings—and external forces outside of the discipline. With regard to the latter, perhaps most striking and dramatic were the Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam War and Watergate.

There is even more to the story, however. From a developmental, life-course perspective, one would ask how events that occur early in life shape later outcomes? Is there continuity in criminology? Or alternatively, are

there turning points? By adopting a life-course perspective, the theoretical framework begun in my oral history work is expanded and the subsequent questions and analyses broadened.

Let's start by examining the life course of criminology in the United States over the last 100 years. At first glance, ideas about juvenile delinquency and crime have changed remarkably. As Hirschi and Rudisill (1976) have observed, biology, psychology and sociology have successively dominated American criminological thought at various points throughout the past century. Not surprisingly, with the rise and dominance of different disciplines, explanatory frameworks have shifted as well. For example, as sociology became more dominant in criminology, Hirschi and Rudisill have argued that "explanatory attention moved away from the offender toward social processes creating him" (1976:21). Likewise, the focus in delinquency research has shifted from individual characteristics (like intelligence) and the family to the gang, community and social structural characteristics (like social class). Eventually, attention has been directed to systems of social control and the larger political economy. In light of these changes in thinking about the sources and causes of delinquency, it is not surprising that thinking about delinquency prevention and control has changed as well. For example, as the field focused less and less attention on the distinguishable differences between offenders and nonoffenders, policies have directed less attention to child guidance clinics and individual training for delinquent youth and their parents.

Looking at criminology in the United States over the last 100 years or so, I see three eras or life-course phases. Era One covers the period from 1900 to 1930 and is characterized by the multiple-factor approach. This era could be thought of as the "Golden Age of Research," where criminological data were gathered and analyzed devoid of any particular theory. "Please, ma'am, just the facts."

Era Two covers the period from 1930 to 1960 and I call this the "Golden Age of Theory." Here is where the theories of Merton, Sutherland, Cohen and Cloward and Ohlin dominated the scene. What is curious is that this body of theory seems to be created independent of any systematic research. That is not to say that these theorists did not draw on research and known facts about crime at the time, clearly they did. My point is a larger one, namely, that there was no systematic attempt to link criminological research to theory.

Era Three covers the period from 1960 to 2000 and in some ways this is the most interesting and significant period, albeit the most confusing as well. I say confusing because the dominant strands in this era are by their very nature contradictory. Thus, when an outsider asks me what are the hot topics now in criminology? My response is always, "Well, it depends a lot on whom you ask." I also think that this era is one of the most

important because I believe, as discussed in more detail below, criminology experienced several turning points during this era. In short, this era is characterized by extensive theory testing of the dominant theories, using largely empirical methods. In this era we have also witnessed new theoretical developments that are grounded in research and facts about crime. Here I am thinking of Ron Akers's social learning theory; Travis Hirschi's social control theory; routine activities/rational choice theory developed by Larry Cohen, Marcus Felson and later Ron Clarke; new developments in labeling theory by Ross Matsueda, John Braithwaite and Larry Sherman; general strain theory by Bob Agnew; new developments in social disorganization theory by Bob Bursik and Rob Sampson; Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi's self-control theory; and, of course, life-course theory of crime as developed by Rob Sampson and John Laub.

This era also contains two additional strands that are important in the development of criminology, especially concerning criminal justice policy and our organization, the American Society of Criminology.⁷ The first is the critique of traditional criminology that came from James Q. Wilson and continued later by John DiIulio, among others. The basic notion is that criminology is hopelessly lost in its search for the root causes of crime and offers nothing to policymakers or criminal justice practitioners interested in doing something about crime. The solution is a simple one. Questions about the causes of crime should be replaced by a focus on making the criminal justice system more effective in deterring and incapacitating dangerous offenders.

An equally powerful critique of traditional criminology came from the left, especially what was known as radical or critical criminology. These intellectual efforts were fueled in part by powerful social movements and significant historical events, namely, the Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam War, Watergate and the Feminist movement. The basic idea of radical criminology is that the causes of crime are obvious, namely, poverty and inequality due to capitalism and that the field of criminology and criminologists in particular should be in the forefront in creating a new social order.

7. For an account of the history of the American Society of Criminology from 1941 to 1974 see Morris, 1975. However, given concerns by ASC presidents about the lack of information about the ASC discussed in Morris's article, a complete historical account of the organization may not be possible. Chris Eskridge, the executive director of the ASC, is reviewing and organizing the materials held in the ASC headquarters in Columbus, Ohio with the hopes of creating an archive of the ASC's history. See <http://www.asc41.com/history.html> for more information on the history of the ASC.

The results of the attacks from the left and the right were severe. Thus, for some Era Three was characterized as anti-positivist research and anti-traditional theory, especially theory that focused on white males. A similar anti-theory vitriolic could be found amongst those interested in criminal justice policy. The fact is that Era Three bore all possible offspring of the parents, Era One and Era Two.

CONTINUITY

At several levels, there appears to be continuity in the life course of criminology. For example, research demonstrating that multiple factors lead to delinquency first appeared in the early part of the 20th century in the works of Sophia Breckinridge and Edith Abbott (1912) and William Healy (1915) and these same findings are repeated anew at the end of the 20th century in the work of Rolf Loeber and David Farrington (1998). More precisely, Healy noted the fact that "practically all confirmed criminals begin their careers in childhood or early youth" (1915:10). He also pointed out that "repeated offenders (recidivists)" because of the frequency of their offending and the seriousness of their offenses "have the greatest significance for society" (1915:10). Finally, Healy called attention to the "advantage of beginning treatment early" (1915:172).

More than 80 years later, Loeber and Farrington write "In general, violent behavior results from the interaction of individual, contextual (family, school, peers), situational and community factors" (1998:xxii). They note that serious and violent juvenile offenders "tend to start displaying behavior problems and delinquency early in life, warranting early intervention" (1998:xx). These authors contend because this group of offenders is responsible for a disproportionate amount of all crime, they "pose a great challenge to juvenile justice policy" and for society as a whole (1998:1). Loeber and Farrington concluded that it is "never too early" to intervene in children's lives for purposes of crime prevention.

In tracing the history of thinking and research on delinquency and delinquent youth an interesting pattern emerges. Typically, old studies are discarded out of hand as outdated and inadequate. The emphasis is on new data because of the belief that crime and delinquency are different in every era yet this idea is rarely examined in any systematic manner. Indeed, there is much evidence to suggest that delinquency has remained the same. Delinquent behavior primarily consists of property crimes, not violence. Delinquent behavior primarily is done by males. Delinquent behavior tends to begin in childhood and peaks in adolescence. Delinquent behavior primarily is concentrated among the poor and ethnic/racial minorities. Delinquent behavior primarily is concentrated in certain neighborhoods within cities. While many youth engage in

delinquency, relatively few commit serious crimes frequently. Those that do are responsible for a large share of the crime problem. In short, the traditional correlates of delinquency have not changed over time (see also Hirschi and Rudisill, 1976).

Yet the same risk factors are discovered and rediscovered by each generation of scholars. The rediscovery of known facts leads in turn to a reinterpretation of old data and findings. To illustrate, one could advance the argument that a consistent theme throughout the 20th century is the search for the small group of persistent offenders. Although labeled differently in each decade, this group has commanded the attention of research and policy. For a moment, consider the evolution of conceptions of juvenile delinquents as “defective delinquents” in the early 1900s, to “wayward youth” in the 1930s, to “delinquent boys” in the 1950s, to “chronic offenders” in the 1970s, and culminating with “superpredators” in the 1990s. The reality is that everyone is talking about the same group of kids, but in different ways (see Laub, 2002a for more details).

CHANGE AND TURNING POINTS

Despite continuity in criminology, there is evidence of significant change. In fact, it is reasonable to argue that criminology had dozens of turning points over the last 100 years. Recall that I am using turning points here to describe a shift in the intellectual trajectory of criminology in a new direction. For purposes of this address, I have identified five turning points in criminology.⁸ These turning points focus on individuals, but in fact these individuals and their work exemplify a set of ideas that changed the intellectual trajectory of criminology.⁹

TURNING POINT #1 – THE WORK OF CLIFFORD SHAW AND HENRY MCKAY

One can argue that the research of Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay has been most influential in the development of criminological theory. There are many reasons for this, but one of the most important is the idea

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8. Of course, for those who have been skeptical of the turning point concept as nothing more than a subjective after the fact reconstruction my discussion here will add further support for that position.
 9. Other turning points that are not discussed here include the development of self-report data on delinquency, President Johnson’s Commission of Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society*, the development of victimization survey data, critical and feminist theory, routine activities theory, Sutherland’s work on corporate misconduct as white collar crime, and the creation of separate academic programs in criminology and criminal justice.

of addressing the problem of crime from multiple levels of analysis. One dimension of their research, illustrated in life histories such as *The Jack-Roller* (1930), examined the social-psychological aspects of crime and delinquency. Shaw and McKay focused on the process of becoming a criminal or a delinquent. Another dimension of their work drew attention to the ecological aspects of crime. Shaw and McKay (1931 and 1942), in sharp contrast to earlier approaches, assessed broader social processes such as immigration, industrialization and urbanization, and their effects on the breakdown of traditional institutions such as family, church, peer groups and the neighborhood at large. Specifically, they studied the distribution of delinquent areas in Chicago over time. Thus, their interest was in the ecological, cultural and group processes of delinquency. The work of Shaw and McKay shifted attention away from individual characteristics of delinquents and nondelinquents (the popular focus in the early 20th century) to group traditions in delinquency and to the influence of the larger community.

The final dimension of the work of Shaw and McKay centered on policy, specifically, the development of the community as a source of crime and delinquency prevention. The Chicago Area Project, community-based organizations designed by indigenous community members, was the manifestation of this interest (see James Short's introduction to Shaw and McKay, 1969, and Finestone, 1976:116-150).

Because of the scope and breadth of their research program, the seeds of virtually all the major schools of sociological criminology and delinquency theory can be found in Shaw and McKay's research. Their analysis focused on both the social organization and the individual aspects of crime and delinquency. Even more important, as Solomon Kobrin noted, "in his public and private statements both to lay groups and professionals he [Clifford Shaw] exerted great influence in creating an image of the offender as a person endowed with human traits and capacities" (Kobrin, 1958:89). Given where the field of criminology was intellectually located in the 1920s and 1930s, this humanistic perspective marked a turning point in thinking about crime and the appropriate response to it.

TURNING POINT #2—THE SUTHERLAND-GLUECK DEBATE

During the 1930s, Edwin Sutherland established the sociological model of crime as the dominant paradigm and as a result became the most influential criminologist of the 20th century. Sutherland developed the nine propositions of his famous theory of differential association (see Sutherland and Cressey, 1955:77-79) and in doing so he provided a sociological interpretation of crime and delinquency that sharply

contrasted with psychological and biological theories popular during the early part of the century. Like Sellin and Shaw and McKay, Sutherland's outlook was influenced by industrialization, immigration and urbanization. However, unlike Shaw and McKay (whose emphasis was primarily empirical) and Sellin (who did not offer a specific theory of crime causation), Sutherland was one of the first criminological theorists.

However, in my view, the turning point for criminology was not Sutherland's construction of differential association theory. Nor was the turning point Sutherland's decision to focus on white collar crime, creating a theory not tied to social class. Rather, it was his attack on the interdisciplinary research on criminal careers by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck. Along with Rob Sampson, I have argued that in the socio-intellectual context of the late 1930s and 1940s Sutherland was driven by: (1) a substantive version of sociological positivism that attempted to establish criminology as the proper domain of sociology, (2) a commitment to the method of analytic induction as the proper way to do research and (3) Sutherland's own rise to prominence in sociology. For Sutherland, the Gluecks' multiple-factor approach to crime represented a symbolic threat to the intellectual status of sociological criminology, and his attack served the larger interests of sociology in establishing proprietary rights to criminology. Despite this devastating critique, there is strong evidence that the Gluecks' research on fundamental issues such as the relationship between age and crime, a focus on criminal careers and longitudinal data, and informal social control mechanisms such as the family are more correct than commonly believed. Nonetheless, Sutherland's view of the role of theory in criminology, assessments of how to evaluate theory, and how to conduct research dominated the field for much of the latter half of the 20th century (for more details, see Laub and Sampson, 1991).

TURNING POINT #3—

CAUSES OF DELINQUENCY BY TRAVIS HIRSCHI

Over the last 25 years, more than any other scholar, Travis Hirschi's work has dominated intellectual discussion and substantially formed the research agenda for the field of criminology. The trademark of Hirschi's body of work is profound theoretical insights coupled with rigorous research methods. Consider *Causes of Delinquency* published in 1969, a book that I mark as one of the turning points in the history of criminology. In this book, Hirschi developed and tested a theory of social control capitalizing on the idea of social bonding. In contrast to then-popular delinquency theories that focused on motivations for delinquency, social control theories focused on the restraints and circumstances that prevent delinquency. In *Causes*, the delinquent is viewed as "relatively free of the

intimate attachments, the aspirations and the moral beliefs that bind most people to a life within the law" (Hirschi, 1969: preface). The theoretical focus then is on the socialization processes that constrain antisocial and delinquent behavior that comes to all individuals naturally. The key question is "why do men obey the rules of society?" For Hirschi, delinquency occurs when an individual's bond to society is weak or broken.

What was unique about *Causes* at the time was that Hirschi developed his theory of delinquency and then tested his own theory as well as other popular theories of delinquency using empirical data derived from self-reports from adolescents about their attitudes and behavior, the dominant research technique during the 1960s. This "testing" approach to assessing theories of crime and delinquency became the standard in the field. As Akers has pointed out, Hirschi's "combination of theory construction, conceptualization, operationalization and empirical testing was virtually unique in criminology at that time and stands as a model today" (1994:116).

Thus, for a variety of reasons, it is no surprise that "social bonding theory has been the dominant theory of criminal and delinquent behavior for the past 25 years. It is the most frequently discussed and tested of all theories in criminology" (Akers, 1994:115). Indeed, reviewers referred to *Causes* as a "turning point in deviancy research," "a highly significant piece of research," and "a work of major consequence" (for more details see Laub, 2002b).

TURNING POINT #4—THE PHILADELPHIA BIRTH COHORT STUDY BY MARVIN WOLFGANG

Delinquency in a Birth Cohort was published in 1972 and the ramifications have been discerned in criminology ever since. First, from a strict methodological perspective, the birth cohort study resurrected interest in longitudinal studies of crime. Although longitudinal studies in criminology were started decades earlier by the Gluecks and the McCords, the idea of a cohort study that followed individuals over time had a new cachet. Second, one of the major findings from this study can be recited by scores of undergraduate criminology and criminal justice majors—a small group of juvenile offenders (6 percent) is responsible for a disproportionate amount of crime (about half). Third, unlike many studies in criminology, this study had clear policy implications. Focus attention on the chronic offenders and crime, especially serious crime, will be reduced (see Wolfgang, Figlio and Sellin, 1972).

The reason I believe the Philadelphia birth cohort study was a turning point in our field is its aftermath. Most obvious is the follow-up study of

the 1945 cohort to age 30 and the much larger study of the 1958 Philadelphia cohort. Like the Gluecks, Wolfgang and his colleagues do not get enough credit for undertaking such massive data collection efforts. But even more, the 1945 birth cohort study refocused attention on age, a prominent concept in life-course research, led to the development of the criminal career paradigm (and the criminal career debates that energized criminology in the 1980s), and ultimately, advanced both developmental and life-course criminology, in my unbiased view, an exciting and challenging outcome for the field.

TURNING POINT #5—THE WORK OF JAMES Q. WILSON

Like the early part of the 20th century, the last 25 years of criminology have been marked by an increasing influence of different disciplinary perspectives being brought to bear on the study of crime and criminal justice. For example, since the 1960s, economists and operations researchers have studied topics like deterrence and capital punishment as well as more general topics such as criminal careers and trends in crime and punishment over time. Psychologists have influenced criminology, perhaps most dramatically in the area of developmental criminology—understanding the development and course of crime over the life span. Behavioral geneticists have renewed interest in individual differences and their role in crime causation. And, finally, political scientists have written on the nature of crime in the United States, suggesting possible solutions for its control.

In my view, the work of the political scientist, James Q. Wilson, has had the largest impact on criminology (for a recent assessment, see DeLisi, 2003). Wilson has argued that criminology should abandon its fundamental mission—understanding crime—to focus more on policy analysis, specifically the prediction and management of dangerous offenders in order to reduce crime and disorder. Wilson's 1975 book, *Thinking About Crime*, remains a tour de force that literally changed thinking about crime by focusing on the role of the criminal justice system, not as criminogenic as claimed by popular theories such as labeling theory during the 1960s, but as a tool to influence the individual decisionmaking of offenders. If potential offenders respond to rewards and penalties, then the response to crime by the police, courts and corrections must ensure that the penalties of crime outweigh the benefits.

Moreover, Wilson, in collaboration with George Kelling, developed the idea of "broken windows" and redirected attention to concepts such as physical and social disorder and their role in not only generating crime, but fear of crime, which in turn can generate more crime and affect quality of life, especially in urban communities (1982). Again, Wilson and

Kelling's work reinforced the idea that the criminal justice system, in this case the police, can do something about crime by fixing broken windows as well as continued the propagation of the notion that criminological theory and its alleged focus on "root causes" was largely irrelevant to such debates and discussions.

POLICY AND THEORY

Drawing on the history of criminology, I will revisit the issue of policy and theory and in doing so address the theme of this meeting, "The Challenge of Practice, the Benefits of Theory." Like many ASC members, I have been troubled by past and current public discourse on crime.¹⁰ As individuals and as a professional organization, we need to do much more to contribute effectively to the discourse on crime, both at the policy level and with the general public. This area is of course fraught with complexities and danger and simplistic proposals will not benefit the discipline, the ASC or public policy. Nevertheless, as individual criminologists and as a professional organization, we should seek ways to become more involved in matters of practice than we have been in the past. However, I strongly believe we must do so in an autonomous fashion and show no favor to those that fund research and/or groups that advocate particular policy positions we happen to agree with ideologically. Indeed, criminology would do well to recapture a more critical view of institutional definitions of crime and overly optimistic solutions to the crime problem, regardless of whether they come from the right or left.

Writing in the 1970s, James Q. Wilson urged criminologists to become crime policy analysts and abandon the "social science" view of crime. Wilson characterized the latter view as one that attacked crime at its "root causes" (Wilson, 1974, 1975). Even more recently, Wilson framed the debate as follows: "For as long as I can remember, the debate over crime has been between those who wished to rely on the criminal-justice system and those who wished to attack the root causes of crime. I have always been in the former group because of what its opponents depicted as 'root

10. Looking over the historical landscape of criminology, there appeared to be far less distinction between theory and practice in the early days of the field. I am struck by re-reading the oral history interviews I did for my book, *Criminology in the Making*, how prominent scholars like Dan Glaser, Don Cressey, Al Cohen and Lloyd Ohlin moved easily between the worlds of scholarship and policy. For one perspective on why the field has changed see Joan Petersilia's presidential address to the American Society of Criminology (Petersilia, 1991). As outlined below, I think there needs to be a middle ground between two popular positions, that is, distancing oneself from policy as proposed by Austin Sarat and Susan Silbey (1988) and the full embrace of policy as advocated by Petersilia (1991).

causes'—unemployment, racism, poor housing, too little schooling, a lack of self-esteem—turned out, on close examination, not to be major causes of crime at all" (1994:32).¹¹ Unfortunately for the field, at the time few challenged Wilson's narrow and quite frankly inaccurate portrayal of criminology (for exceptions, see Hirschi, 1979 and Gottfredson, 1982).¹² Nevertheless, the damage was done. Criminology, especially criminological theory, "could not supply a plausible basis for the advocacy of public policy" (Wilson, 1974:48) and for Wilson, the answer was to replace causal analysis with policy analysis. Wilson wrote,

Policy analysis, as opposed to causal analysis, begins with a very different perspective. It asks, not what is the cause of a problem, but what is the condition one wants to bring into being, what measure do we have that will tell us when that condition exists, and finally what policy tools does a government (in our case, a democratic and libertarian government) possess that might, when applied, produce at reasonable cost a desired alteration in the present condition or progress toward the desired condition? (1974:50).

Criminology, specifically criminological theory, was deemed at best as having difficulty working in such an intellectual framework. At worst, criminology was deemed as irrelevant because it was alleged to be hopelessly bound by a sociological bias that emphasized aspects of society that are beyond the reach of policy (Wilson, 1974:53). Equally damaging was the characterization of criminology as embracing a "profoundly subjectivist" perspective that focused on attitudes rather than behavior (Wilson, 1974:50, 53) along with a deterministic perspective, not a free will perspective, which Wilson argued "may be scientifically questionable, but

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11. John DiIulio continued the equating of "root causes" with factors such as poverty in the same fashion as Wilson. To illustrate, in a speech on fighting crime DiIulio referenced "the traditional socioeconomic, or 'root-causes' perspective on crime" (1995:13). Ironically, by narrowly defining root causes during the 1960s, a golden opportunity to assess the effects of criminal justice sanctions on criminal behavior at the micro- and macro-level was missed.
 12. Hirschi concluded that "Wilson's confusion on the logic of causation and its implications for social policy is absolute.... By Wilson's logic, all causes of delinquency are irrelevant to public policy" (1979:209). In a similar vein, Gottfredson contended that Wilson's "argument that etiological research and theory are inevitable dead ends for crime policy because they search for causes that cannot change is specious in two respects: It rests on a faulty characterization of the ultimate aim of causal analysis and thinking, and it rests on specific theoretical interpretations of the links between background factors and crime as biologically or socially immutable, although plausible rival interpretations exist" (1982:33). For a more recent critique of Wilson's perspective and its effects on criminology see Garland, 2001 and Rosenfeld, 2002.

it is prudentially necessary" (Wilson, 1974:50). The result was a theory and policy divide that was unnecessary and ultimately counterproductive for the field.¹³

Over the 25 years I have been in this business, what has always surprised me is the disdain that prominent academics, policymakers and politicians have for our discipline. A couple of examples should suffice. Perhaps some of you read the remarks of John DiIulio, who was quoted that he "would most definitely rather be governed on crime policy by the first 100 names in the local phone book than by the first 100 names on the membership roll of the American Society of Criminology" (*The Washington Post*, February 26, 2001: C2). This comes from a person who referred to the new generation of juvenile criminals as "superpredators" and argued that "today's bad boys are far worse than yesteryear's and tomorrow's will be even worse than today's" (Bennett, DiIulio, and Walters, 1996:26-27). Well, there is no doubt that the arguments regarding superpredators as developed by DiIulio were dead wrong (see Cook and Laub, 1998, 2002).¹⁴

Statements by politicians are equally disquieting. For example, then Governor of Georgia Zell Miller commenting on research showing boot camps are not effective in reducing crime told *The New York Times*: "Nobody can tell me from some ivory tower that you take a kid, you kick him in the rear end, and it doesn't do any good. I do not give a damn what they [academic researchers] say" (Kaminer, 1994:114). Along similar lines, in a comment on the study of Project Exile by Jens Ludwig and Steven Raphael, which showed that the popular anti-gun program was probably not responsible for the decline in homicide in Richmond, Virginia during

13. For a more thoughtful discussion of the differences in social science and public policy analysis see Mark Moore (1983). Moore argues the goals of social science and policy analysis are fundamentally different. In my view, good science can do both, namely, contribute "to the core concepts and ideas of discipline" and "inform policymakers about the likely consequences of alternative policy choices" (Moore, 1983:273). It is a myth that applied research is atheoretical, on the contrary, as argued by Richard Berk, "strong theoretical foundations are absolutely essential" (Berk, 1981:208). The more important issue in my view is that ultimately policy choices are dictated by more than science (see, for example, Hanft, 1981:608 for more details). Daniel Patrick Moynihan has stated, "social policy must flow from social values and not from social science" (*The Boston Globe*, April 16, 1985: 19). As noted below, this crucial point has been missed in discussions within criminology relating to the theory versus policy debate.

14. One can ask why DiIulio's idea of "superpredators" was so influential politically yet so inconsistent with the facts. In fairness, it should be noted that John DiIulio has recanted his earlier views on this subject (see *The New York Times*, February 9, 2001). Whether DiIulio's focus on "faith-based" initiatives will suffer a similar fate as the "superpredator" idea remains to be seen (see Suskind, 2003).

the 1990s, David McCoy, a police officer in charge of field services for the Richmond Police Department, said, "The reality is: It was a public safety initiative that has proven very successful on many fronts that may not be academically linked." He went on to say, "We believe—and we always will—that it played a major role [in cutting crime]. Exile was designed to reduce the carry rate of firearms, reducing the opportunity of a criminal to use a firearm in an illegal way, and we think we had many successes on that" (*The Washington Post*, January 4, 2003:A2). Even more recently, Tom Menino, mayor of Boston, said: "Without an increase in summer jobs, the city could face an increase in youth crime." When asked about the research evidence that supported his assertion, Menino responded, "Statistics lie. Sometimes you do not need them. What do criminologists know? They read books. I study it every day by talking with people" (*The Boston Globe*, July 10, 2003:A1). As Wendy Kaminer pointed out: "Knowledge isn't power in criminal justice debates; knowledge is irrelevant" (1994:114). What reigns supreme in the policy world are "gut instincts" or "intuition." The sheer anti-intellectual threat to our discipline that is inherent in such positions needs to be taken more seriously than it has been to date.¹⁵

Although I have followed the Chicago Cubs and the Boston Red Sox my entire life, I do not want to end this address on a note of pessimism about the future. We have a strong tendency to favor dichotomies, all or nothing propositions, and subsequently we are forced to choose, theory or policy. The theme of this conference is "The Challenge of Practice, the Benefits of Theory." I want to reiterate the commonly heard plea that in order to enhance policy and practice one needs sound research.¹⁶

15. Following recent shifts in the field of education (see Traub, 2002), some have advocated moving criminology and criminal justice to adopt the paradigm akin to evidence-based medicine as a solution to this state of affairs (Sherman, 1998; see also Campbell Collaboration Crime and Justice Group, www.campbell.gse.upenn.edu). Using the umbrella of "What Works in Reducing Crime," the centerpiece of this approach is the randomized controlled experiment. I am skeptical of this approach because I believe the problem of policy is as much a theoretical issue as the type of research one employs to study crime. Indeed, the adoption of one method as the "gold standard" for social science research and evaluation may have detrimental effects on the field (see Felice Levine, COSSA Executive Committee Meeting minutes, May 21, 2003). I would argue that much can be learned from studies that have *no* intervention component.

16. I see no reason to discuss the obvious. Criminology, like fields such as education, suffers from a surprising lack of scientific studies (see Sherman et al, 1998; Krueger, 1999). Moreover, federal expenditures for data collection, research, and evaluation in criminology and criminal justice are shockingly tiny. However, my focus here is the future conception of the science we do with our limited funds.

But I also want to advance a bolder claim, namely, that in order to enhance policy and practice one needs not only sound research, but strong theory.¹⁷ Successful theories organize the findings of an area, attract the attention of a broad spectrum of researchers and scholars, and provide influential guides to public policy. James Coleman has observed, “one of the criteria for judging work in social theory is its potential usefulness for informing social policy” (1994:33). Despite efforts by many to divide theory and research from policy, the fact is theory, research, and policy are deeply intertwined and central to the lives of everyone involved in explaining crime and advancing justice and public safety.

In an important paper focusing on poverty research and policy, Martin Rein and Christopher Winship point out that although social science research is relatively weak (that is, providing at best modest effect sizes), “the use of strong causal arguments to justify claims about what we ought to do often is highly problematic” (2000:27). These authors go on to discuss six issues that reflect “the dangers in the unthinking use of causal thinking in the policy process” (2000:28). These include overselling, fragile rationales, weak causal chains, over-generalization, elimination of personal responsibility and confounding of issues. The same argument can easily be applied to criminological research and policy. In my view, a solution to the problem of “weak causal theories” is not to reject theory as irrelevant in policy debates, but to use this as a challenge to create stronger theory. The reality is most policy issues are moral questions that cannot be answered by theory or for that matter research (see, for example, Rein and Winship, 2000:40–41). This basic point has been missed by many ASC members seeking to use the guise of science and the ASC as a scientific organization to advocate specific moral and political causes. Moreover, the idea that scholarly knowledge and this knowledge alone should determine policy outcomes is naive.

The issue is ultimately one of ideas.¹⁸ In his book, *The Metaphysical Club*, Louis Menand points out that one of the lessons of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* was not the danger of ignoring facts because of some preconceived theory but rather the danger of collecting facts without a

17. Consistent with my thesis that new ideas are rare in the life course of criminology, more than 20 years ago, Michael Gottfredson concluded that the so-called failure of the rehabilitative ideal stemmed in part “from the avoidance of theory in rehabilitation efforts” (1982:41).

18. Many challenges face criminology and the ASC as we continue to grow and become more diverse and one challenge is diversity itself. In a recent article in *The New York Times Magazine*, Lawrence Summers, the President of Harvard University, said, “The idea that we should be open to all ideas is very different from the supposition that all ideas are equally valid” (Traub, 2003:30). An important distinction for the field of criminology to keep in mind in my view.

working hypothesis. Science must be theoretical and our theories must be scientific. Science and theory cannot be divorced. According to Menand, "Darwin's ideas are devices for generating data. Darwin's theory opens possibilities for inquiry" (2001:141). Rather than identifying specific programmatic initiatives, criminological theory provides a set of orientating ideas and research findings regarding the mechanisms that lead to, reduce or sustain offending.¹⁹ Over the last 25 years, there have been several key developments in criminological theory and research that offer a new way of thinking about crime and what to do about it. These include a life-course/developmental perspective that embraces the idea of continuity *and* change in behavior as individuals age; recognizes the importance of multiple factors, multiple pathways, and multiple contexts in understanding behavior; acknowledges the prominence of co-occurring problem behaviors; and highlights the salience of social ties and social control. (For more details see Sampson and Laub, 1993 and Laub and Sampson, 2003.) Policies and programs that are consistent with these orientating ideas seek to build connections across an array of social institutions developing what some have called "authoritative communities" (see Commission on Children at Risk, 2003).

CONCLUSION

Although many think that the ASC president has enormous power, the irony is that the only real power the president has is to make a presidential address that allows him or her to speak to those in power. The presidential address is a forum to challenge the received wisdom in our field and an opportunity to offer new ideas to shape the future of criminology.

Drawing on Donald Levine's *Visions of the Sociological Tradition*, I am arguing here that criminology needs to develop a meaningful narrative about its historical development in order to chart a course for its future (Levine, 1995:290). The future challenges in criminology are large, but together we can create a "dialogical narrative" within criminology that connects different aspects of our discipline, especially theory and practice,

19. There ought to be strong tension between science and policy in criminology and given the history of criminology in Europe and America it can be no other way. As David Garland has pointed out "It [criminality] was a scientific problem but also a social problem to be addressed, attacked, and transformed" (1985:127). Examining criminal anthropology in the United States, Nicole Rafter (1992) noted tension in criminology as an applied discipline with the primary goal of crime control and as a scholarly discipline with the primary goal of producing knowledge about criminal behavior. This historical development is now coupled with the fact that many are attracted to the field because of its emphasis on theory *and* practice. Like many who have degrees in criminology or criminal justice, I came to this field not with a desire to be a theorist, but to be a cop.

into a more coherent whole (Levine, 1995:297). This dialogical narrative must be informed by our past, but not bound by it. Criminological theory *and* practice will benefit from dialogue because through meaningful communication heretofore unrealized connections across a variety of domains will be established. Such dialogue will move us closer to the model proposed by Mark Moore in which “society acts on problems not by first learning and then acting, but instead *simultaneously learning and acting*” (1995:312).²⁰ As Levine notes, “A dialogical approach offers the basis for a narrative that is maximally informative and inclusive. It offers a way to pursue our quest that enables us to take advantage of the contributions of others rather than isolate ourselves from one another” (1995:325). Levine concludes that such “dialogue is not just a way to overcome fragmentation and promote coherence in academic disciplines, nor is it only a way to replace wasteful polemics with creative inquiry. The very form of dialogue offers a kind of model for the ethical life” (1995:326). One possible way to bring theory, research, and policy together for a meaningful dialogue is to create a mission statement for criminology.

Ultimately, the challenge for criminology is an intellectual one (see Abbott, 1999 for a similar argument about sociology). We need to recapture the intellectual excitement that criminology had when I entered the field in the early 1970s. Ideas matter and they matter a great deal. Ideas are the core of what we do and, as I have argued here, our ideas must be grounded in the history of our field. As the historian Marc Bloch has pointed out, “Misunderstanding of the present is the inevitable consequence of ignorance of the past” (1964:43). Or, as stated more eloquently by Eddie in the movie, *Barbershop*—“You can’t get respect unless you know your history.”

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20. In his paper, Mark Moore critiques the “social research and development model” and explores alternative models such as agricultural extension services and teaching hospitals (see Moore, 1995, for more details). Where I differ with Moore is with respect to his views of the role of criminological theory in these models.

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