



Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Essential Criminology* (3rd edition) by Mark M. Lanier and Stuart Henry

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They enjoy the very act of telling and bring it along as a high-order art form. Likewise, they are thrilled to discover in class the rare (alas!) student with a comparable gift, and they skillfully provide a platform on which that young adult can hone his or her natural gift. Ziner's unusual book is of this type; that is, it is a display of his natural storytelling prowess that provides a sound invitation to readers to draw on their own story-completing abilities to help round out the exercise.

Even as we move to replace static (overpriced) hard-copy texts with overdue hypertext-aided electronic "vooks" (software manuscripts with embedded optional video material), so should we also move to incorporate far more fiction into the sociological text canon. Not just the usual fine nominees (1984; *Brave New World*; *The Color Purple*; *Cry, the Beloved Country*, etc.) but also brand new works, as by Allan Furst (the outstanding creator of a fictional war-torn Europe from 1933–1939), John LeCarre (the outstanding creator of any place, time, or characters he turns to), Cormac McCarthy (whose novel *No Country for Old Men* tells more than many readers can take about our national plight), and Matt Beynon Rees (the outstanding new creator of Middle East realities, especially those of the Palestinians).

Likewise, attention is owed this first novel by Ziner, not just because the author is one of ours but rather because the tale has teaching merit of note (along with humorous touches, philosophical asides, and humanist values). Hopefully, its example will inspire others in our ranks to soon follow suit. Hopefully, he will himself soon pen a successor volume, an aid to assessing the resolutions we have in the meantime come to ourselves. Good sociology, a "moveable feast," draws us along in this empowering way.

Mark M. Lanier and Stuart Henry.
Essential Criminology (3rd edition). Boulder, CO:
Westview Press. 2010. 488 pp. \$48.00.

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Essential Criminology is a pretty bold title. It suggests that the authors, Mark Lanier and Stuart Henry, have produced a text that provides all

a student *needs* to understand crime (or at least lays the essential foundation for the understanding of crime). After reading this innovative text, I am convinced that the authors made good on their title.

This is a unique criminology text, and the authors make that clear from the start of *Essential Criminology*. Does anyone read the preface and acknowledgements sections of books? I am guilty of impatiently skimming over the preliminary sections marked with tiny roman numerals in order to get to the pages with the "real" numbers. Having agreed to read and review *Essential Criminology*, however, I decided to scrutinize the book cover to cover. And it's a good thing, too. Lanier and Henry had me questioning my own criminological imagination by page xi. In the initial paragraph, the authors start to build an argument about the need to globalize our approach to crime. While I have a healthy appreciation for the need to expand our disciplines beyond our borders, it never occurred to me that my criminology course needed to "go global." Most of us (i.e., criminologists) take pride in the fact that our criminology courses look beyond American street crime to white-collar crime, to corporate crime, and to political and elite deviance. But do we need to go global too? Lanier and Henry believe that we do:

Since we first wrote this book in 1997 and the second edition in 2003, the world has certainly changed. It has become increasingly globalized, and we appear more interconnected with others. That change also includes the nature of crime: environmental and financial harms from multinational corporations and investment bankers, global political terrorism, and violence at home, work, and school, all of which have become more significant, in terms of the seriousness and extent of harm caused, than the threat from strangers on the street. (P. xi)

Global thinking may come more naturally for these scholars. Henry was raised in working-class London, and Lanier, who grew up in a military family, spent his childhood in a variety of places, including California, Florida, and England. They have seen the world from unique vantage points. Furthermore, they tell us in the preface that they have different and complementary interests and beliefs. For example, apparently Henry has serious doubts about the worth of scientific methods, while Lanier is devoted to them. This is all good

information. I preach to my own students about getting to know an author before reading her or his work. That is, where are the authors “coming from”? What unique experiences, ideological positions, and events have shaped their thinking? After all, theory and data are human, political, and social constructs. The authors of *Essential Criminology* do some of the footwork for us.

The first two chapters are simply and ambitiously titled “What Is Criminology?” and “What Is Crime?” respectively. These are big questions. And their answers are sweeping and enormous. Chapter 1 (“What Is Criminology?”) begins with a discussion of the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center, global trends in terrorism, armed conflict, the global economy, diseases, and global communication. The authors make a strong case for seeing crime within a broad, international perspective that moves beyond the media’s preoccupation with “inner-city gang violence, child abductions, car-jackings, drive-by shootings, serial murders, workplace homicides, and drug wars” (p. 12). Their argument is persuasive if a little intimidating. Will the average criminology major be able to rise above his or her interest in the roots of ultraviolence, behavioral profiling, and crime scene investigation to appreciate Lanier and Henry’s panoramic vision of crime? Helping criminology students to make this transition is a daunting task for all criminology instructors. This book will support that cause.

But, at times, the big picture provided by the authors feels too inclusive. In Chapter 2 (“What Is Crime?”), the authors define crime using a patchwork of examples from their introductory discussion about the questionable sexual exploits of college football players, to the inhumane treatment of animals, to the criminalization of substance abuse. Their point is that defining crime too narrowly is dangerous because “harms that might otherwise be included are ignored” (p. 24). This is an important point, especially when one considers the long-running omission of certain harmful acts (e.g., domestic violence or genocide) from criminology syllabi. But as Lanier and Henry point out, when the definition of crime is too broad, almost every human transgression could be defined as crime. In their controversial criminology treatise, *Crime and Human Nature*, Wilson and Herrnstein (1985) took this point to its radical conclusion:

The word “crime” can be applied to such varied behavior that it is not clear that it is

a meaningful category of analysis. Stealing a comic book, punching a friend, cheating on a tax return, murdering a wife, robbing a bank, bribing a politician, hijacking an airplane—these and countless other acts are all crimes. Crime is as broad a category as disease, and perhaps as useless. (P. 21)

While Lanier and Henry’s treatment of crime seems a bit too inclusive at times, they make effective use of a variety of examples to show that crime is a social construction that depends upon complex definitional processes engaged in by politicians, policy makers, the power elite, and the general public. The authors are particularly effective at displaying the complexity of crime definition by employing the use of John Hagan’s pyramid of crime and their own original model, the crime prism. Sociologists of crime will be impressed with Lanier and Henry’s ability to creatively place *crime* squarely in social context.

There is, however, a significant omission from the authors’ treatment of crime’s definition. That is, there is almost no discussion of the major sources of crime data. As the authors point out, defining and identifying crime and criminals is a tricky business. *Crime* has been reified through the construction of the Uniform Crime Reports, the National Incident-Based Reporting System, victimization surveys, and self-reports studies. Chapter 3 would be even more effective if Lanier and Henry had discussed these data sources in detail and provided a critique of their strengths and weaknesses. And, in keeping with their global approach, the authors might have discussed international sources of crime data, such as Interpol and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reports.

Chapters 3 through 12 are dedicated to outlining and critiquing criminological theory. And this is where the analysis really shines. Lanier and Henry are talented and lively writers and do an outstanding job bringing criminological theory to life. The theory chapters are organized thematically (e.g., Chapter 3: Classical, Neo-classical, and Rational Choice Theories). The authors begin their theoretical surveys by placing each school of thought in historical perspective. Students of criminology will benefit from Lanier and Henry’s sociology-of-knowledge approach to the production of crime theory.

Furthermore, each theoretically based chapter provides an insightful section on policy

implications and a discussion of the conceptual and empirical limitations of each perspective. These critiques are detailed and critical, but even-handed. This text will provide an outstanding theoretical foundation for undergraduate criminology students. Instructors interested in getting their students "turned on" to criminological theory will find this book extremely valuable. Moreover, sociologists will appreciate Lanier and Henry's efforts to trace many criminological perspectives to pioneering sociological thinkers. The authors give accessible, effective accounts of Durkheim, Marx, Weber, and Simmel (among others) and expertly link their ideas to the study of crime.

In the end, *Essential Criminology* is a well-written, insightful, and innovative take on crime in the modern world. It has inspired me to globalize my own approach to criminology instruction. While the book has an interdisciplinary flavor, sociologists in particular will find it to be an outstanding text for their upper-level criminology courses.

REFERENCE

- Wilson, James Q. and Richard J. Herrnstein. 1985. *Crime and Human Nature*. New York: Simon & Schuster.