

Are Criminal Justice Studies and Criminology in the Business of Producing Idiots?

Frauley, Jon, ed.
C. Wright Mills and the
Criminological Imagination.
Prospects for Creative Inquiry.
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The critique voiced by C. Wright Mills (1959) on the growth of an applied and technology-driven science, the rise of a “bureaucratic ethos” and the implications of these for knowledge production are familiar to many criminologists, at least to those who have a background in social sciences. The concept of *criminological imagination* was developed some thirty years ago and has to some extent been discussed in the field. Jock Young, for example, published a book *The Criminological Imagination* in 2011. Yet, in the big picture, as the contributors to

the volume *C. Wright Mills and the Criminological Imagination* edited by Jon Frauley stress, radical sociology has had little impact in criminological or criminal justices studies. The demise of the criminological imagination has been one of the motivations for writing and editing the book. The book calls for a holistic criminology and encourages multi-level thinking and observation.

C. Wright Mills and the Criminological Imagination is a collection of twelve essays. The contributors put forth criminological interpretations, theorizations and applications of Mills' ideas. The book consists of three parts: while the first addresses the criminological imagination and the criminological field, the second and third parts scrutinize theoretical and empirical insights and implications with respect to the criminological imagination. The authors promise to "offer insights, extensions and reformulations of his [Mills'] ideas while at the same time examine the intersection of 'criminological enquiry' and 'criminological imagination'" (p. 3), and they do deliver on their promise.

The text aims, on the one hand, to offer a framework for understanding how criminology has itself contributed to the reproduction of bureaucratic domi-

nation and the production of "cheerful robots", uninformed, alienated and politically disengaged academics, and, on the other, to open up new possibilities for an imaginative criminology as well as make suggestions for how it could be developed and expanded. The authors consider this as being particularly important because criminology has become a popular and growing academic field. In chapter 3 Carrabine points out that this expansion should not be seen as something solely positive, since much of criminology has developed into an applied, vocational industry, producing criminal justice professionals rather than critical thinkers.

For those readers of the journal at hand who are unfamiliar with the criminological field in Finland, it should be pointed out that in this country criminology is a fairly marginal(ized) field of research, and unlike the United Kingdom and United States, for example, criminology is not taught as degree studies. It is however, possible to take courses in criminology for example at the Faculty of Law at the University of Turku. Besides Turku, systematic, long-term research is conducted also at the University of Helsinki (KRIMO), HEUNI, in the Police College of Finland, and to some extent, at the University of Eastern Finland. Per-

haps due to the relatively small number of researchers (who all know each other), the divides between different approaches in the criminological field and the struggles between different schools of thought described in the book are not as apparent in Finland as they are in the Anglo-American countries under scrutiny. This is not to say that there is only one school of thought in Finnish criminology, however; the rough divide between mainstream criminology and critical criminology is also discernible here, and we too have our share of "research technicians." Nevertheless, the discipline as a whole is not only a technique-driven bureaucratic enterprise producing policy-relevant, seemingly "objective" research that will yield tangible, immediate benefit for industry and government. But the move towards such a direction is a topical risk, given the recent developments in government-led research funding.

The book asks important questions, which are also relevant to others fields: Are criminal justice studies and criminology (and sociology) in the business of producing idiots? Do they produce symbols of power that legitimate domination or do they strive to identify and deconstruct such symbols? (p. 24) According to the authors, criminological knowledge-production

in the Anglo-American world has been increasingly subject to greater government intrusion and is in the risk of losing its academic status. The contributors to the volume call for empirically informed theorizing and theoretically informed empirics in the study of crime, criminalization and crime control. It is not enough to only produce information about a particular problem, such as gangs, drugs, corruption, online hate, juvenile delinquency or white collar crime. These phenomena should be linked to the broader contexts of politics and power, and their connection to public concerns should be stressed. Drawing on Edwin Sutherland's unsurpassed definition, the book reminds us that criminology studies the processes of making laws, breaking laws, and the reactions towards the breaking of laws (p. 92). Crime and punishment are always bound to wider social processes and closely linked with power, and addressing these issues is precisely what makes *C. Wright Mills and the Criminological Imagination* relevant. The book provides several concrete examples on what lessons we can learn from different topics, such as the study of prison officers, climate change, fiction, and security projects.

Some of the contributors point out how the demise of the crim-

inological imagination has also had an impact on education. These concerns are relevant for those who are involved in teaching on any crime-related subjects, be it criminology, social sciences or legal education. In Chapter 9 Barton and Davis address the deepening difficulties of educating future generations in a hostile climate. In the authors' view, everyone should develop a critical criminological imagination, and students present an obvious target group. This is important in particular because students' understandings of "crime" tend to derive from dominant media narratives where those who belong to the most marginalized population groups have become sources of entertainment as well as targets of public hostility. Contemporary representations of crime often individualize complex social matters, treating people as the source of problems and punishing society's most marginalized populations, such as refugees.

In his analysis of global cybernetic power Pfohl points out how neo-liberal regimes of control have produced punitive populism and calls for a power-reflexive criminology. Even though the general punitive turn witnessed in many Western countries has not yet been realized at a large scale in Finland, the discussion is nev-

ertheless topical. The Finnish tradition of a humane and rational criminal policy, boosted by the overall political climate, may be on the brink of change. In this context, I highly recommend this book for all criminologists and social scientists.

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