

Richard Quinney's *The Social Reality of Crime*: A Marked Departure from and Reinterpretation of Traditional Criminology

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with Francis T. Cullen & Tony Platt*

ON THE OCCASION OF THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PUBLICATION OF *THE Social Reality of Crime* (Quinney 1970a), the November 2010 Meeting of the American Society of Criminology (ASC) in San Francisco featured a panel to discuss the legacy and continuing relevance of this pathbreaking book.¹ Richard Quinney authored over 30 books and nearly 80 articles in his lifetime and recently ranked among the top 10 most-cited scholars in criminology (Wozniak 2011, 223). *The Social Reality of Crime* has continued to be popular and influential up to current times. The issues and concerns it raised are featured in widely adopted contemporary textbooks in introductory sociology (Schaefer 2010; Witt 2010), criminology (Brown, Esbensen, and Geis 2013; Siegel 2007), and criminological theory (Lilly, Cullen, and Ball 2011; Vold, Bernard, and Snipes 2002).

As Richard Quinney (2000a, xi) noted:

In the preface to my book, *The Social Reality of Crime*, published in 1970, I stated that my purpose was to provide a reorientation to the study of crime. It was my intention to create a new theoretical perspective for criminology, drawing from past criminology but informing the new perspective with the sensibility that was forming at the end of the 1960s.

In a new introduction to the fourth printing of the book (Quinney 2008, ix), Javier Trevino wrote:

Three decades after it was published, Richard Quinney's *The Social Reality of Crime* remains an eloquent and important statement on crime,

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law and justice.... At the time of its appearance in 1970, the theory of the social reality of crime—as a critical reinterpretation of criminology—not only liberated the field from being a recitation of the policies of the police, courts, and corrections, it also, and more importantly, represented a marked departure from the traditional analysis of crime that viewed criminal behavior as pathological in nature.

In this spirit, the following commentaries add further perspective to the legacy of *The Social Reality of Crime* for present and future analyses of crime.

Francis T. Cullen: *The Social Reality of Crime*—The Lessons Learned

When Chuck Reasons kindly invited me to participate in the ASC panel celebrating Richard Quinney's seminal work, I must confess that I was honored—of course—but also perplexed. I was not one of Richard's students, nor am I typically seen as someone who lives in the critical-peacemaking end of the discipline—though I do occasionally hang out there.

So, I quickly redirected Chuck's attention to my good friend and Quinney scholar, John Wozniak. Chuck thought that including John was a great idea and said, "Good, now you can both be on the panel!" This inability to avoid participating in the session occasioned acute anxiety, because I immediately panicked about what the hell I could say. But Chuck's invitation had the unanticipated—and positive—consequence of prompting me to revisit Richard's *The Social Reality of Crime*.

This book resides on a shelf in my office—as it has for over three decades—just several feet from where I sit at my desk. The difficulty with age is that books that I read in graduate school as exciting new contributions have been transformed at my current career stage into historical works! But as I revisited *The Social Reality of Crime*, I not only recalled how important this volume was on my first read, but also realized how so much of its content continues to ring true and to illuminate today's crime and justice issues. Indeed, Richard's erudition in this treatise is extraordinary, ranging from philosophy to the sociology of law to criminology. It is a book that contains many lessons. Younger criminologists, in particular, should be encouraged to enjoy an excursion through its chapters. Although the book may be "old" in years, they certainly will find many "new" ideas to weigh seriously in it.

Past Lessons Learned

The Social Reality of Crime was published in 1970. As I have said, it was a book of inordinate scholarship. But many works of fine scholarship appear, are ignored, and are relegated to the criminological dustbin. Fortunately, this was a time when those of us in the field were ready to hear and learn its central lesson, which was this: crime is not simply an objective reality, but also a constructed reality.

First, we were a generation whose realities had changed dramatically in our lifetime. We grew up in the 1950s when America was one way, and then witnessed virtually everything we were taught and accepted—whether about race, gender, religion, culture, or trust in authority—become fundamentally challenged in the 1960s and early 1970s. It seemed that we believed one thing one day, and another thing the next. In this context, it made sense to us that realities are not fixed but created—or, in Richard's terms, constructed.

Second, the bad behavior of the state, from the Vietnam War to Watergate, made us receptive to the idea that realities were not a reflection of social consensus, but were rooted in power and interests. The use of power to control the law and shape conceptions of crime was a core theme in *The Social Reality of Crime*. Again, those in the field—especially those entering the field at this juncture—were prepared to hear this lesson.

Another factor was the emergence of what Robert Merton calls a “cognitive environment” or “cognitive community.” This is a group of scholars—either locally concentrated or in a virtual community across the nation—that shares common insights, reinforces one another's views, and combines to create a strong paradigm in a discipline. Thus, Richard's voice was perhaps singularly powerful, but he was part of a larger chorus of scholars that was developing similar arguments.

In sociology, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann had published *The Social Construction of Reality* in 1966. In 1970, Alvin Gouldner's magisterial *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* appeared. This work forced us to see that sociologists not only study reality, but also participate in its social construction—that what we say shapes public conceptions of the world. This message also appeared at the micro-level. Erving Goffman's analysis of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* showed how interactional realities are constructed. Thomas Szasz discussed the social construction of mental illness in his *The Myth of Mental Illness* (though I found his *The Manufacture of Madness* even more compelling).

In criminology, similar developments occurred. In 1969, Tony Platt gave us his brilliant book, *The Child Savers*, in which he illuminated how juvenile delinquency was invented—or, in other words, socially constructed—and how this justified legal responses that often damaged wayward youths. Within criminology, the focus on how behavior is criminalized was extensive, with Austin Turk's and Bill Chambliss's writings particularly influential to me and others.

The point is that, taken together, these works—with Richard's at the front—*problematized crime and responses to it*. We could no longer assume that acts were inherently criminal or that reactions to offenders were somehow natural or foreordained. Instead, we now had to see how every aspect of crime was intimately affected by how it was conceptualized or defined. Further, we could no longer ignore that power, group interests, and conflict were a fundamental part of crime and its control. In short, after learning that social reality was constructed, my generation of criminologists could never see the world in the same way again.

Current Lessons to Be Learned

Now, there are at least two reasons why scholars today should revisit *The Social Reality of Crime*. First, there are historical reasons. This is a work that defined a way of thinking about crime. To understand our intellectual heritage, it should be read.

In the same vein, it should also be read to understand the development of Richard's thinking. Richard's scholarship has experienced many transformations over the years—although, as John Wozniak has told us, these transformations have been less turning points abruptly leading in different directions than a flowering of ideas whose roots can be traced back to Richard's earlier writings, including, in particular, the book discussed here.

The second reason to revisit Richard's work is because it provides insights into understanding the construction of crime today. It has lessons to teach us. In this regard, I can point to three ideas central to my own work for which Richard's book still has relevance. These lessons are:

- Examine which actors and harms are criminalized and why;
- Understand that the nature of public attitudes is complex;
- Unpack how conceptualizations of the world affect our willingness to be punitive—especially images and stereotypes.

Lesson 1: The Criminalization Process

In 1978, three teenage girls were driving a Ford Pinto when their car was hit from behind. The car suffered a ruptured gas tank, exploded into flames, and killed them—two right away, one later. All died from burns, not injuries, and thus would have survived had the Pinto not been consumed by fire. Along with my coauthors, I would come to write a book on this case called *Corporate Crime Under Attack: The Ford Pinto Case and Beyond*.

What made this incident so striking is that a conservative prosecutor from Elkhart, Indiana, prosecuted Ford on criminal charges of reckless homicide. Eventually, Ford was found not guilty, but the very fact that the case proceeded to trial was national news and set an extraordinarily important precedent: *corporations that physically harm people can be prosecuted—criminally—for a violent crime*.

My coauthors included Gray Cavender, Bill Maakestad—the prosecutor's brother and a business law professor—and, in the second edition, Mike Benson. The case itself was fascinating: the Goliath of Ford versus the David of a small prosecutor's office (helped out by liberal law professors). But the larger criminological question was why Ford, at this particular time, could be prosecuted for a crime when other corporations who had killed people had not.

Richard's work provides an insight into understanding this issue. In Chapters 3 and 4 of *The Social Reality of Crime*, Richard sensitizes us to the way in which interests shape the formulation and application of the law, typically in the direction

that protects the powerful. In the Pinto case, the structure of interests had to change for a powerful actor, such as Ford, to be charged with a crime. The state had to be placed into a situation where its interests would be advanced if it prosecuted a corporation—and hurt if not.

At the core of the expanding criminal liability of upperworld offenders, including Ford, was the legitimacy crisis experienced by the state. In the 1960s and beyond, state officials were increasingly accused of operating a criminal justice system that was rigged to favor the rich and powerful. To combat this attack on its legitimacy, the state had to demonstrate its commitment to equal justice. Prosecuting a corporation—and other white-collar offenders—helped to solve this legitimacy problem. Although entrenched economic interests limited the scope and prevalence of these prosecutions, such cases nonetheless earned prosecutors acclaim in the media and votes on Election Day. Accordingly, careers were often enhanced by efforts to “go after” white-collar offenders, making criminalization more possible than in previous sociohistorical periods. Put another way, in a different context Ford’s prosecution would never have occurred.

Building on this latter point, another key consideration is how the individual prosecutor, Michael Cosentino, constructed the case. With outside help that alerted him to design defects in the placement of the Pinto’s gas tank, he came to see the case as a matter of Ford placing greed (the failure to fix the faulty Pinto so as to save money) over safety and human life. This social construction allowed him to set aside his conservative ideology and to define the girls’ deaths not as a tragic automobile accident, but as the consequence of the conscious decision by Ford executives, in the pursuit of profits, to allow three innocent teenagers to drive a lethally dangerous automobile. This disregard for human life, in Cosentino’s mind, constituted the crime of reckless homicide.

Lesson 2: Public Attitudes Are Complex

In Chapter 9, “Public Conceptions of Crime,” Richard notes that there is evidence that the public favors repressive responses to crime, including harsher courts. But he then goes on to make an observation that has often escaped scholars in the ensuing decades. He notes that despite these punitive sentiments, the public manifests attitudinal ambivalence, pointing out that polls also show support for rehabilitation.

My own work, which spans the past three decades, confirms Richard’s insight. In fact, starting with the polls cited by Richard in *The Social Reality of Crime*, every survey I have conducted and virtually every one I have read has shown the same thing: the American public is punitive, but also favors the rehabilitation of offenders—especially juveniles.

These results are important because they call into question that the American public is exclusively punitive and will only support punitive policies. Indeed, past social constructions of the citizenry as punitive have erroneously legitimized the view that no progressive policies are possible because the public will not tolerate them.

By contrast, the understanding that the public also strongly embraces rehabilitation lets us know that ideological space exists for reform.

Lesson 3: Images and Stereotypes about Crime Matter

Also in his chapter on public conceptions, Richard comments on how images and stereotypes of crime and offenders can feed punitive responses. The larger point here is that there is no one-to-one correspondence between the objective reality of crime (whether it is rising or falling, for example) and people's support for punitive policies. Rather, objective reality is filtered through the images and stereotypes that people hold. And unless we unpack these filters, we will not understand why support for punitive practices such as mass incarceration holds strong.

For about five years Jim Unnever and I (and Jim gets most of the credit here) have been engaged in a project to identify and deconstruct these filters. It has been an effort to probe what it is about the schemas in people's minds that shape their thinking about crime. Our particular interest has been in analyzing two of these images or schemas: religion and race.

Briefly, with regard to religion, we were interested in why research had reported contradictory findings regarding religion's impact on punitiveness. Did strong religious commitment make people meaner or nicer? From our studies, we were led to the conclusion that religion was not a monolithic variable, but diverse in its nature and effects. It had to be unpacked. Thus, our work revealed that people could hold very different images of God—from harsh to loving. Most interesting, we discovered that individuals who embraced the image of a loving God, with whom they had a personal relationship, were much less punitive.

With regard to race, we were interested in how the dislike of minority groups might affect support for harsh policies. Jim and I demonstrated—first in the United States and then across Europe—that those who harbored racial animus were more likely to favor punishment, including the death penalty. This finding suggested that support for punitive policies was not simply the result of objective conditions (i.e., crime rates), but was filtered through a prism of racial prejudice and stereotypes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that understanding social reactions to crime—from which harms are criminalized to which crime control policies the public supports—will be incomplete unless we are attuned to the ways in which social reality is constructed. In *The Social Reality of Crime*, Richard laid the foundation for a rich line of inquiry that remains as salient today as it was 40 years ago. Again, I invite all criminologists, including my younger colleagues who are less familiar with this criminological classic, to consult Richard's book and, as I have, to draw important lessons from its pages.

Tony Platt: On Richard Quinney's *The Social Reality of Crime*

My comments today focus on *The Social Reality of Crime* as an artifact of an era, a piece of historical evidence about what was going on in criminology/sociology in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The book can be read as a reflection of some of the debate and tumult going on within sociology and criminology, and among sociologists and criminologists, at an extraordinary political moment. A close textual reading suggests that Quinney himself was in transition and in an argument with himself.

Theoretically—and this is a very theoretical and idea-driven book—the battle was on between positivist criminology and labeling and conflict theory. Quinney sides with social constructionism and “intellectual revisionism.” His book dismisses crime as behavior other than as a product of a socially defined phenomenon. He is not so much charting new ground as codifying an emerging tendency (Becker's *Outsiders* and Goffman's *Asylums*, etc.) He draws upon new developments in sociology, especially the sociology of law, and political science, but interestingly the book is mostly ahistorical (and that is its major weakness). And, for now, he sidesteps Marxism and dances around class.

Quinney draws upon an impressive weight of evidence to show how the legal system and therefore crime is socially constructed. The book is a window into a compelling literature that we studied back in the day: George Vold's *Theoretical Criminology* (1958), Rusche and Kirchheimer's *Punishment and Social Structure* (1939), Skolnick's *Justice without Trial* (1966), and Jerome Hall's *Theft, Law and Society* (1952). And there is an interesting commentary on Edwin Sutherland's observation in 1950 about sexual psychopath laws being formulated during a time of moral “panic” (long before Stuart Hall and Stan Cohen popularized the term).

The book also reveals the tensions among intellectuals about their role in political struggles. For most of this book, you would not know that 1968 was a pivotal moment in global politics, that the 1960s was a time of political turbulence (there is a hint on the cover), or that urban ghettos had erupted throughout the previous decade, leading to unprecedented repression. When Quinney sticks his neck out prior to the last chapter, he does so oh-so-carefully: “It appears that Americans, as compared to other peoples in representative governments, are politically intolerant of social and political differences.... Criminal penalties for homosexual acts in the United States tend to be severe.” The issue of abortion “is subject to debate.... A solution to the problem of abortion is by no means clear.... Police must develop a professional orientation that is sensitive to individual rights.... Negroes have been exposed more than others to the misuses of police power.” Quinney includes a strikingly racist cartoon from the *Daily News* in 1969 (on p. 283), but tellingly does not comment on it.

In 1970, when this book came out, Quinney was 36 years old, and on the fast track in academia. He got tenure at New York University in 1968 and became a

full professor in 1970. In this book, you can see the struggle going on within him. In the last chapter, he takes a stand. It is as though he has made a leap into a newly found courage and commitment. He takes on Richard Nixon's campaign for law and order, and George Wallace's racism:

The law and order issue was also becoming a racist euphemism for suppressing the demands of blacks in the urban ghettos.... The Bill of Rights is in danger of being tacitly repealed in the name of law and order.... Law enforcement can in itself be a form of instant violence.... Crime has become a political weapon that is used to the advantage of those who control the processes of government.

In this last chapter you see Quinney in transition, about to become a leftist and to shift toward Marxist analysis. (You can see the same transition going on in my work by comparing the 1969 and 1977 editions of *The Child Savers*.) In 1971, he moved to Chapel Hill and "found a good socialist community," as he puts it. His 1970 book reveals the struggles that were going on within the intellectual stratum: "Whose side are you on?" This was a historical moment when liberal intellectuals were pulled right and left, when it was impossible to stay unmoved in the middle. The tension and political polarization produced some very bitter rifts within academia, as exemplified at the School of Criminology in Berkeley, where liberals such as Jerry Skolnick sided with the anti-radical faction on campus.

For intellectuals such as Richard Quinney who moved left, there was a great deal of hard-earned privilege to possibly lose. Unlike most academics of his day, Richard took a stand for social justice and sided with the powerless. He and I had many arguments in the 1970s and 1980s—some theoretical, some organizational—and moved in different left circles. In retrospect, all the political tendencies we supported failed, so that neither of us can righteously claim, "I was right, you were wrong." But as Samuel Beckett says and Quinney's life exemplifies, "No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better."

Thank you, Richard, for continuing to live a committed life, to be willing to try to fail better. I wish you a healthy recovery. I am sorry you are not with us today to help us recall an extraordinary moment in history.

John F. Wozniak: Richard Quinney's *The Social Reality of Crime*—Ways That I Link to It and Ways That Richard Views It

It is a great honor to be a discussant on this panel. Thank you, Chuck Reasons, for including me. How should I start my talk about *The Social Reality of Crime*? Upon reflection about issues relating to this panel, it occurred to me that from the 1990s to the present, most of my criminology research has been linked to Richard Quinney.

One of Richard's last coedited books (2004) called for the development of a "storytelling sociology." Adapting this theme, I will tell you five parts of my story about how Richard had an impact upon my work as a criminological theorist and researcher. After that, I will impart insights that I gained about *The Social Reality of Crime* upon further study of Richard's criminological work.

My Criminological Narrative about Richard Quinney

The First Part of My Story

During the latter 1970s, I was a graduate sociology student at McMaster University, in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. I received my PhD in sociology there, having been attracted to this program because of its strong emphasis on theory, particularly European sociological theory.

Richard Quinney's writings were commonly included in the list of readings for graduate seminars and comprehensive exams of this doctoral program. Graduate sociology students at McMaster were repeatedly discussing his writings and were not quite clear what he was actually developing, since he published *The Social Reality of Crime*, then wrote Marxist books, and thereafter authored books about religion. I recall very well that there were many concepts and thrusts in these writings that caught my attention.

The Second Part of My Story

During the 1980s, I began to teach courses in our department about crime, such as criminology, juvenile delinquency, the sociology of corrections, and the sociology of corporate crime. I found that Richard Quinney's writings filtered into each of these courses.

In the early 1990s, I kept hearing about a new theory of crime—peacemaking criminology. During that time, I was a program coordinator for critical criminology sessions at a 1994 Meeting of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS) and asked authors (who contributed to the seminal book of readings, *Criminology as Peacemaking*) to participate in a roundtable titled, "What Is Peacemaking Criminology?" The authors who led this ACJS roundtable session included Hal Pepinsky and Richard Quinney—who coedited this peacemaking criminology book—as well as Kay Harris, Lila Rucker, and others. It was heartening that the conference room for this session was packed full of attendees, who (like me) desired to learn more about the basic tenets of peacemaking criminology. After attending that session, I became "hooked on" peacemaking criminology and I have identified myself ever since as a peacemaking criminologist.

As a result, I conducted a content analysis of *Criminology as Peacemaking*, as well as a survey of peacemaking criminology authors (Wozniak 2000b). This latter research enabled me to write an article (in honor of Richard Quinney) that

specified core elements of a circular theoretical model of peacemaking criminology (Wozniak 2002).

The Third Part of My Story

In 1997, I attended the Justice Studies Association's first annual meeting, which had "Peacemaking Criminology and Restorative Justice" as its conference theme. After one of the sessions of this meeting, Richard Quinney informed me about another book that he was coediting and asked me, "What do you know about the work of Erich Fromm?" I told Richard that I had studied various writings of Erich Fromm in relation to the topic of alienation as part of my preparation for a comprehensive exam (on the individual and society) at McMaster University.

Richard then invited me to write a chapter for his coedited book (Anderson and Quinney 2000) about how Erich Fromm's view of alienation could be related to the study of crime. Feeling very honored, I accepted his request and wrote "Alienation and Crime: Lessons from Erich Fromm" (2000a).

The Fourth Part of My Story

At the book exhibit at the 2000 conference of the American Society of Criminology in San Francisco, Mickey Braswell and I discussed Richard Quinney's book about his scholarly and autobiographical writings, titled *Bearing Witness to Crime and Social Justice* (2000a). We were intrigued with how this book demonstrated the various ways in which Richard had challenged status quo thinking about crime over three decades.

Hence, Mickey and I invited a group of authors to reflect on Richard's *Bearing Witness* book and then to write an essay in keeping with Richard's writings about crime or showing a progression in his thinking and writing. Mickey and I coedited eight articles (received from this group of authors) in a special issue titled "Criminology at the Edge: Essays in Honor of Richard Quinney" in *Crime & Delinquency* [April 2002, Vol. 48(2)].

Adding four other writings to this set of articles, Mickey and I (along with Ronald Vogel and Kristie Blevins) coedited a book, *Transformative Justice: Critical and Peacemaking Themes Influenced by Richard Quinney* (2008). In keeping with Richard's criminological work, transformative justice is a perspective that "sees crime as an opportunity to build a more caring, more inclusive, more just community" (Morris 2000, 21).

The Fifth Part of My Story

I was invited to write a chapter about the work of Richard Quinney for Frank Cullen's coedited volume of 2011 (*The Origins of American Criminology*), which was "intended to explore how leading criminological scholars 'came up with' their theoretical perspectives, particularly in respect to the ways in which their theoretical

approaches were developed and their career paths were chosen" (Wozniak 2011, 223). I accepted this request and conducted four phone interviews with Richard (from early to mid-November 2008).

These interviews were presented in my chapter, entitled "Becoming a Peacemaking Criminologist: The Travels of Richard Quinney" (Wozniak 2011; for further discussion of Richard's biography and a summary of his criminological writings, see also Wozniak 2010). Five periods of his life emerged from email discussions and phone interviews:

1. 1960–1965: First teaching jobs, Canton, New York, and Lexington, Kentucky. Civil rights movement begins. *Criminal Behavior Systems*, empirical research, first articles.
2. 1965–1971: In New York City, antiwar protests and the counterculture, *The Problem of Crime*, *The Social Reality of Crime*, radical sociology, photography.
3. 1971–1974: Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Sabbatical leaves from NYU. Resigns from full professor position and joins a socialist community, *Critique of Legal Order*. *Beginning of Class, State, and Crime*.
4. 1974–1983: Providence, Rhode Island. Part-time teaching positions. Marxism, theology, spiritual search, revision of *The Problem of Crime*, writing of *Providence*, Buddhism.
5. 1983–2000: Return to the Midwest, DeKalb, Illinois. Ethnography of everyday life, keeping of journals, photography, teaching environmental sociology, teaching peace and social justice, personal essays, *Criminology as Peacemaking*, *For the Time Being*, *Borderland*.

Notably, *The Social Reality of Crime* was written while he was living and working in New York City, where he became involved in antiwar protests, the counterculture, radical sociology, and photography. His other notable books were written in various towns in which he experienced other social contexts and interests. He emphasized to me that his writings are best viewed as "connected" throughout his career. In his own words:

My own travels through the 1960s, the 1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s were marked by a progression of ways of thinking and acting: from the social constructionist perspective to phenomenology, from phenomenology to Marxist and critical philosophy, from Marxist and critical philosophy to liberation theology, from liberation theology to Buddhism and existentialism. And then to a more ethnographic and personal mode of thinking and being. It is necessary to note that in all of these travels nothing was rejected or deleted from the previous stages; rather, each new stage of development incorporated what had preceded it. Each change was motivated by the need to understand crime in another or more complex way,

in a way excluded from a former understanding. Each stage incorporated the changes that were taking place in my personal life. There was to be no separation between life and theory, between witnessing and writing. (Quinney 2000a, x–xi)

Insights about the Relevance of *The Social Reality of Crime*

While conducting research for my chapter in *The Origins of American Criminology* (Cullen et al. 2011), I asked some of Richard's colleagues to comment about their views of *The Social Reality of Crime*. Three of his colleagues (Hal Pepinsky, David Friedrichs, and Randall Shelden) indicated that they used *The Social Reality of Crime* as a required textbook when teaching their first criminology courses.

These colleagues, along with Ray Michalowski and Ron Kramer, said this book influenced them greatly as they undertook research in their areas of criminological study (i.e., Pepinsky in peacemaking criminology and restorative justice, Friedrichs in white-collar crime and the sociology of law, and Shelden in the study of youth and gangs, as well as juvenile and adult corrections). Michalowski and Kramer (2006, 66) stated that *The Social Reality of Crime* affected their work on “state-corporate crime”:

During my phone interviews with Richard Quinney, he told me about various phases of his work life. For example, in the 1960s and the 1970s, Richard explored, in his thinking and writings, issues pertaining to the “causal order of crime variables.” As he stated to me: “What leads A to B and vice versa?” In the beginning of *The Social Reality of Crime* (2008, 4), it was stipulated that: “The theory I am proposing rests upon certain assumptions about theoretical explanation: these assumptions are in regard to (1) ontology, (2) epistemology, (3) causation, and (4) theory construction.

However, Quinney (2008, 5–6) cautioned that a “statement of causation does not necessarily state the nature of reality, but is a *methodological construction* of the observer.” He argued that “we must not use the causal construct as it has often been applied in physical science,” and that “causative explanations of crime have tended ... to be based on the mechanistic conception of causation.”

Imogene Moyer's (2001, 208) textbook on criminological theory drew attention to Quinney's reasoning about theory and causation. She quoted from *The Social Reality of Crime* to illustrate that he “distinguished conflict theory from functionalist and mainstream criminology in both theory construction and research methods.” That is, according to Quinney (2008, 5–6):

- Much of criminological theory, based on positivistic assumptions, has sought to explain the “causes” of crime.... Causal explanation need not be the sole interest of criminologists. The objective of any science is not

to formulate and verify theories of causation but to construct an order among observables.

- A statement of causation does not necessarily state the nature of reality but is a *methodological construction* of the observer. "Causes certainly are connected by effects, but this is because our theories connect them, not because the world is held together by cosmic glue." The scientist who defines a causal relationship has to see that it is a construct imposed by himself in order to give meaning to a significant problem.
- What is required in the explanation of crime, if a causative explanation is formulated, is a conception that is attuned to the nature of social phenomena.
- The social scientist's constructs have to be founded upon the *social reality* created by man.

During his phone interview, Richard discussed how he was drawn to George Vold's work on conflict theory and to ideas in labeling theory. In their textbook on criminological theory, Williams and McShane (2004, 170) showed how Quinney's theory (in *The Social Reality of Crime*) incorporated elements of these latter two theories when he "began to question the definitions of crime and the legal process offered by authorities." Although Quinney later became a Marxist criminologist, "his first conflict approach was of the pluralist variety and reflected Vold's conflict theory as well as social interactionist theories":

The theory was an integrative one, which also incorporated concepts of differential association, social learning, and labeling. At the same time, Quinney was rejecting *traditional* ideas of science, by which researchers believed themselves to be working with the real world. He began to argue that reality is merely what we perceive it to be.

They argue that Quinney viewed crime, like other labeling theorists, as the product of reaction. The reaction of most importance, though, is that of the legitimate authorities who "not only react to behavior but also impose definitions of the types of behavior that can be defined as criminal. They do so by using political power to create and place into criminal law those behaviors to which they object. Those in lower-class positions are more likely to engage in objectionable behavior and, indeed, learn such behaviors from those around them."

This discussion leads to a consideration of how Quinney viewed his *Social Reality* book. The book was developed after he completed his dissertation in 1962 ("*Retail Pharmacy as a Marginal Occupation: A Study of Prescription Violation*") and his criminal typology book with Marshall Clinard (1967). In the third edition of *The Problem of Crime: A Peace and Social Justice Perspective*, Quinney and Wildeman (1991, 72) characterized critical criminology as "a radical questioning of the justness and effectiveness of all our social institutions. It begins and ends

with the overwhelming question: Is this particular set of institutionalized social arrangements the best of all possible ways to achieve the fullest development and realization of the human potential of all people?"

In this light, Quinney and Wildeman (1991, 72) pinpointed arguments surrounding *The Social Reality of Crime* within the analytical concerns of *critical criminology*. They wrote:

Many criminologists began to emancipate from the concrete, unquestioned socioeconomic realities of the time and reach out for an understanding of the more basic social forms that constitute capitalist society. For example, for the first time, criminologists began to look seriously at social arrangements such as private ownership of the means of production, the sale of human labor power as a commodity, the fundamental class structure of our society, and the class biases of our criminal justice system (Taylor et al. 1973; Quinney 1970a). All of these social realities were now seen as part and parcel of the problem of crime in America.... No longer could crime be understood apart from the capitalist structure of America itself, crime in America inhered in capitalism and in capitalist institutions.... There developed a keen realization that a critical criminology must go beyond the official definitions of crime established by the state and state control agencies ... [and] free itself from service to the few and to lay bare the contradictions of our master institutions, contradictions that created an antihuman and criminogenic social structure.

In *Journey to a Far Place: Autobiographical Reflections*, Quinney (1991a, 73) contended that "what is needed now is a reorientation to the study of crime, a theoretical perspective by which research in criminology can be reinterpreted and current happenings can be understood. My work in criminology takes on new meaning and purpose." He then argued that "when we examine crime as a human construct, in a politically organized society, we are able to raise new questions about justice. I conclude the preface to *The Social Reality of Crime* by writing, 'I contend that a relevant criminology can be attained only when we allow our personal values to provide a vision for the study of crime.'"

In his chapter "Socialist Humanism and the Problem of Crime: Thinking about Erich Fromm in the Development of Critical/Peacemaking Criminology," Quinney (2000b, 22) pointed out that in the beginning of *The Social Reality of Crime*, he "had written that 'we have no reason to believe in the objective existence of anything....' To this day, I am happy to be counted among the existentialists." He went on to say:

The problem of what is real and how reality may be known goes far beyond the traditional debate over the objective and the subjective. It has to do, rather, with the human mind's inability to think and see beyond its own innate construction.... We have the mind to question the reality of

our existence, universal and otherwise, but we do not have the capacity to answer with objectivity and certainty.

How does this frame of thinking extend to the analysis of crime? Here, Quinney (2000b, 21) stated:

- As a critical criminologist, I find it ever more difficult to witness crime or to think about crime.
- Instead, I envision a world without crime, and that vision comes from imagining a world that would not produce crime.
- To be a critical criminologist is to imagine what might be possible in this human existence.
- Great care, then, must be taken in our response to crime. Our actions—our social policies—must be consistent with our understanding of crime, and let it be maintained that the realization of peace in our everyday lives is the best social policy.

Finally, in response to my request concerning his current opinion of *The Social Reality of Crime*, Richard emailed me this letter on November 15, 2010:

Dear John,

I am grateful to you and all others (and Chuck Reasons as organizer) for participating in a session on my book *The Social Reality of Crime*. You asked me how I feel about the book now, what I think about the book forty years later.

Well, simply put, I'm glad that I wrote the book, that I was able to write it. You likely know that as soon as the book was published I was on to another way of understanding crime. As the 1970s began, I and many others were reading Marx and knowing that our work must be a part of our new understanding. We knew, as well, that our teaching and writing and our formulations in criminology must be a part of the radical movements of the middle 1960s and onward. Civil rights, antiwar, feminism, critique of capitalism—must now be integral to criminology. Theoretical formulations would incorporate the thoughts and actions of the times.

My conscious attempt in the thinking that went into the writing of *The Social Reality of Crime* was to do—was to bring to criminology—what Edwin Sutherland had done thirty to forty years before: to take the corpus of criminology and place it into a new theoretical framework; to bring a new sensibility to criminology, one that reflected the popular sensibility and behavior of the time. I was living in New York, teaching in the sociology department at New York University. I felt that I was in the center of what was happening in the world. (I was also aware of what was happening at the University of California in the school of criminology, and I visited

several times and learned from criminologists at Berkeley, from Tony Platt, Paul Takagi, Herman and Julia Schwendinger, and Drew Humphries, in particular. A meeting, it seemed to me, of East and West.)

The social reality of crime, as a perspective, was able to include the full range of criminology, from the making of law, to criminal behavior, to law enforcement and criminal justice, to the various social reactions to crime. This was a social constructionist perspective. The perspective was a critical one. Soon, as the book was being published, I knew (along with others) that we had to expose/explore the sources of lawmaking and all other things associated with crime. Ultimately, the problem was the society itself. Only with a different society (for me, a socialist one, a classless society) could there be a good society with little crime. This also meant that criminology must go beyond the perspective of the social reality of crime. That criminology must locate the source of class and power, and make possible a form of practice.

(An aside, of where we thought we were going as academics: I remember being in my office on the third floor of the NYU building on the corner of Washington Square North and University Place when the manuscript for *The Social Reality of Crime* was returned to me in the morning mail, after the publication of the book. I unwrapped it and threw it in the wastepaper basket. I was not going to save the manuscript (which began as a handwritten manuscript, as all my book manuscripts have been) to be archived. I told my colleagues, in my office at the time, that this was not “great literature.” In other words, my reference for good writing was beyond academic writing. I was now reading the works of novelists and creative nonfiction writers. I was also impressed with the new journalism. I read weekly, with fascination and care, *The Village Voice*.)

I continued to revise “my criminology” as the world changed and as I changed. With each change, I would attempt to respond with a change in the criminology I was teaching and writing. Eventually, my life and work became more concrete, ethnographic (so to speak), and less abstract and theoretical. I engaged in a writing that was more personal, and I wrote a series of books in the form of personal essays. My form of documentation became more visual, and I used photographs in my writing.

My life now is in a community of artists, photographers, and writers. (I am also trying so save the family farm.) Granted more time, and energy, I might bring what I am experiencing and learning into criminology. But, then, of course, as you know, only maybe; I have always had an ambivalent relation to the criminological (and now, criminal justice) enterprise. Maybe we are being called to some other form, some other life.

With thanks, Richard

Conclusion

During one of our phone interviews, Richard Quinney told me that *The Social Reality of Crime* is one of his books in which he was searching for different ways to approach the problem of crime. To this day, it is an amazing book. Why?

It is very thought provoking as it revolves around theory construction, with discussions of issues about human nature, methodology, conflict, power, and definitions of crime in terms of its formulations, applications, and patterns. It is certainly an original, unique piece of criminological work. Indeed, there is nothing like it within the field of criminology, even to this day.

Richard Quinney (2008, 316) stated in the final chapter of *The Social Reality of Crime* that “crime begins in the mind.” In this sense, a conceptual reality of crime is constructed. In his chapter in *Criminology as Peacemaking* (Quinney 1991b, 4, 9), he suggested that another way to conceive of this construction is that “crime is suffering” and “we must be aware of the causes of suffering within ourselves and search for the reasons that make us suffer.”

Hence, “there can be no peace without social justice, and without social justice and without peace, there is crime” (Quinney 200b, 22)—which remains an ongoing social reality of our time.

NOTES

1. The panel, organized by Charles Reasons (Central Washington University), included four discussants: Francis T. Cullen (University of Cincinnati), Tony Platt (California State University, Sacramento), John F. Wozniak (Western Illinois University), and Helen Taylor Greene (Texas Southern University). Richard Quinney was invited, but was not able to attend the conference. This article presents the observations delivered by the first three discussants at the panel.

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