



# Ethnographers, Pimps, and the Company Store

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I confess. I have had impure thoughts about the effect criminology has had on crime policy and the effect that the criminal justice system (police, courts, jails, and prisons) has had on criminals' behavior. This chapter is based on these impure thoughts and conveys the following ideas. The first idea is that there is a major difference between ethnography and criminology. This difference influences what students of criminology and criminal justice, but also the general public, know about crime and criminals. Furthermore, this understanding of crime and criminals then influences policymakers' decisions about crime intervention and the treatment of criminals.

The second idea is that today's criminal justice system exploits criminals as socioeconomic capital. These criminals are investments, fertilizer for the growth of criminal justice agencies (police, court services, prisons). With agency growth comes hiring more employees, issuing higher salaries to managers and administrators (with retirement and medical benefits), and, of course, employing consultants who are often university professors and former agency employees.

However, enormous expenditures to expand the criminal justice system have made few substantive strides toward, say, lowering rates of violent and property crime and "rehabilitating" criminals. Why? Voters have learned to believe that the criminal justice system is designed to combat street crime, slow the genesis of young criminals, and redirect the lives of convicted offenders. At the same time, voters have been deceived by criminologists, criminal justice professionals, and politicians who suggest either that the construction of prisons can deter criminal behavior or that, once built, prisons ("correctional institutions") can effectively rehabilitate ("correct") criminals, if these institutions receive sufficient public support (a euphemism for large budgets) for inmate treatment (drug

and alcohol therapy) and programs (remedial education and vocational education).

These are empty and expensive promises. The criminal justice system is merely a warehousing service, and surely is not the place to look for crime's cause or cure. Crime and criminals are products of much more complicated cultural issues. What's more, an ebbing of crime would mean a slowing in the economic upsurge of the criminal justice industry.<sup>1</sup>

I am not a criminologist, although for many years I have studied prisoners and adolescent and adult street criminals. Most of my friends are either criminologists or practitioners in the criminal justice system. I was once a senior administrator in an agency of the U.S. Department of Justice. But, alas, I am an anthropologically trained ethnographer and have done research in many places around the world for more than twenty-five years. In this light, I explain below what an ethnographer does and how he or she does it, and how the process of the ethnography of crime is different from the criminological study of crime.

Over those twenty-five years of anthropological research, I have slept peacefully on Salish and Nootkan Indian reservations on the northwest coast of North America, in the central valley of Mexico, in the highlands of Guatemala, on the islands of Java and Sulawesi in Indonesia, and in dozens of hotels and motels near state and federal prisons all over America. But my peaceful nights were disturbed in the summer of 1995 when I began spending my days with the Fremont Hustlers, a group of adolescent boys and girls, in Kansas City, Missouri.<sup>2</sup> The Kansas City Police Department calls this group a "gang." But what the Fremont Hustlers are called by police and the courts isn't important here. What is important is this: after I began hanging out at the intersection of Fremont Avenue and 13th Street, a corner "owned" by the Fremont Hustlers, my restful nights ended and were replaced by sleeplessness or nightmares.

I spent months thinking about why the Fremont research had such troubling personal effects and talking about these effects to my closest friends, some anthropologists, others criminologists. What I discovered was that I am angry: angry at myself, angry at criminologist colleagues, and, most of all, angry at the criminal justice system itself.

Don't misunderstand. I am not angry because someone forced me to study the Fremont Hustlers. After all, I asked the Harry Frank Guggen-

heim Foundation for research funding to do this research and received a grant. It doesn't bother me to hang out in a dangerous neighborhood where there is a youth gang, drive-by shootings, and drug sales. I enjoy the risks and the excitement that comes with them. I enjoy the company of Fremont Hustlers and prefer the Fremont neighborhood to my campus. But the enjoyment I derive from hanging out with these kids and the pleasure of writing about them does not compensate for the pain I feel as I watch their slow self-destruction.

To many adolescents, gang life must look like fun. Believe me, it isn't. Most Fremont kids are drug addicts. Many are violent. Some are killers. A few have made it to Kansas City's Most Wanted list, a kind of honor roll for school drop-outs and adolescent miscreants who enjoy hurting people. Fremont kids have taken handguns and rifles and assault weapons and have shot other kids who are just like themselves: poor, uneducated, drug-addicted, violent kids who were abused and neglected by their mothers and fathers. They shoot at and kill people for reasons we think are trivial, such as verbal insults and jealousy over girlfriends. But, most of all, these kids do violent things because it feels good to them. The excitement of pointing a nine-millimeter semiautomatic handgun at someone and then pulling the trigger is like nothing else in the world, they say. Not only do I abhor this violent behavior, I despise the parents of the Fremont Hustlers for perverting and transforming children into teenage urban predators. Worse yet, the parents of these kids were perverted by *their* parents. And when it comes to the intergenerational transmission of violence, I refuse to fall into this trap: *tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner*.<sup>3</sup>

At a time when most kids are entering junior high school, Fremont kids are in juvenile detention centers, prisons for kids. To watch Fremont kids sublimate their own pain into killing and maiming other kids, commit suicide by ingesting noxious drugs, and put themselves in life-threatening situations makes me angry.

But what causes my anger? It's simple. Youth gangs are the single most dangerous law enforcement problem in America today, say law enforcement officials. To combat this growing danger, there are national gang conferences held in fancy hotels. At these sessions, gang researchers, gang prosecutors, gang police, gang consultants, and gang interventionists lecture at one another, gather for cocktail parties and dinners, and then go home—to arrest, prosecute, and imprison young gangsters. Gang

researchers, and I'm including interviewing gang kids who are publishing the results in and seek out young gangsters to do this too.<sup>4</sup> Mind you, offenders is a lifestyle these prepared to accept. A lawf Fremont Hustlers give up all their companions, and begin and any teenager suddenly giving an adult?

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researchers, and I'm included among them, go about the business of interviewing gang kids who are in jails and juvenile detention centers and publishing the results in dust-covered journals. Gang interventionists seek out young gangsters to offer them an alternative lifestyle; and I have done this too.<sup>4</sup> Mind you, the alternative lifestyle we offer adolescent offenders is a lifestyle these teenagers know nothing about and are ill-prepared to accept. A lawful lifestyle would require, say, that Fremont Hustlers give up all their current street companions, find new "straight" companions, and begin another lifestyle from scratch. Can you imagine any teenager suddenly giving up all of his or her friends at the request of an adult?

Here is a central irony in the criminal justice system, as well as in the "gang research, suppression, and intervention industry": the hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars spent by gang researchers, gang cops, and gang probation and parole officers are allegedly meant to effect radical changes in the behavior of the most inadequately socialized and poorly adjusted adolescents. Yet, they are the ones least able to make drastic lifestyle changes. When these adolescents (and this applies to adult offenders too) don't change, we get angry and "throw the book at them." Imagine a supercilious judge, a pompous probation officer, or a condescending cop lecturing a seventeen-year-old gang member who's been on his own since he was eleven: "Now even though your parents beat the hell out of you, your mother's lovers sexually molested you, and no one ever read a book to you or showed you by example that education is valuable, we now want you to go to school, get a job, and be responsible like we are. So there. Now do it."

Juvenile justice officials engage in the business of imprisoning kids as if these criminal justice practitioners and their advisors—the criminologists—did not in fact know the tragedy of kids' lives, and more generally how difficult it is for any child to grow up in America today. The superficiality of the criminal justice system and of banal interventions oftentimes causes more pain to damaged kids than it resolves. This angers me.

I don't believe that evil forces, such as pornographic literature and violent movies, lurking in American culture compel men like Ted Bundy and John Wayne Gacey into doing truly evil things. Perhaps those who argue that violent movies cause violent behavior have never seen inside a violent family. I have seen inside households where preschool children

watch their mother being "humped" by her boyfriend on the living-room couch, while in the next room young gangsters smoke marijuana and rock cocaine and fiddle with handguns. These kids' real lives should be rated PG 18, V (for graphic violence), L (for filthy language). Where are the social workers? Where are the interventionists? Where are the conservatives who preach family values?

I am unwilling to defend violent Fremont Hustlers like Chucky D, who at age fourteen took a baseball bat and beat homosexuals, robbed them, stole their cars, and burglarized their houses. Cara, a Fremont Hustler and one of Chucky D's girlfriends, said, "Chuck's evil." And he didn't get that way by watching Hollywood movies and reading pornographic books. Evil and violence engulfed Chucky D in his early life family, and for some reason criminal justice professionals and the courts believed that sending him to adult prison at age fifteen, again at age seventeen, and yet again at age nineteen would teach him a lesson.

Over many years of hanging out with Chucky D and others like him, I have learned how to describe with objective clarity what I see. But descriptive clarity doesn't mean I must be neutral about Chucky D and other violent Fremont Hustlers as they inflict pain on other kids. What these kids do to themselves is awful to see.

What Fremont Hustlers have done to others is illegal and it's immoral. But we, the voters, the criminal justice professionals, the criminologists, the ethnographers let it happen—and then when blood is spilled, we jump into the ring and offer after-the-fact interventions or propose more survey research to help us find the "correct" independent variables that predict the violence surrounding us.

Americans have become accustomed to politically correct talk. We hear it from elected officials who dance around sensitive social issues such as poverty and racism and their link to crime. Neutrality helps protect us, the onlookers, from the horror of the real lives criminals live, and from the real-life devastation wreaked on others by criminals of all colors and on criminals themselves by their culture via parents and street companions.

America has a long history of political correctness and cover-ups. Cover-ups rename things, and when that happens we lose sight of the problem. Schoolchildren study the westward expansion of the railroad in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Our children have learned

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to call this expansion the "conquering of the West." What does that expression mean? Strip away the neutrality and get beyond the political correctness, and, lo and behold, we find that "conquering of the West" means killing American Indians, stealing their land, and stripping them of their language and culture. Why did the American government sanction and encourage westward expansion? It did so to benefit wealthy businessmen. Here, entrenched in the history of American culture, is what I call metaphorically "the company store." The company store is a place where financially influential and thus powerful people trade on the social and financial disadvantages of the poor and powerless.

In our midst today, there is yet another company store. This one relies on the neutrality of criminology and its pretense that "science" is, by its very nature, better than and preferable to real-life images. The business of criminology is the manufacture of crime statistics. While useful for understanding crime trends nationwide, crime statistics transform flesh-and-blood people into "people-free" variables and categories, such as delinquents, at-risk and high-risk youth, and suppression targets. A fourteen-year-old "boy" who has been involved in street crime for years may engender your compassion, but a fourteen-year "suppression target" goes straight to prison.

By transforming "people" into "criminals" and then into people-free events—that is, crime trends—criminology conjures the image that crime has no face. Then, of course, faceless agents of crime ("offenders") can be mistreated any way lawmakers wish. And victims become faceless statistics too. I can't be emotionless about the boys and girls, and the men and women, who inflict pain and misery on others. If teenagers do violent things, put them in prison. Yet I can't be silent about a criminal justice system, social service agents, and elected officials who act only to punish and imprison lawbreakers and do virtually nothing to prevent the genesis of predators like Chucky D.

The core of anthropology and the central difference between a criminologist's and an ethnographer's approach to crime is captured in the expression: *Homo sum: humani nil a me alienum puto*.<sup>5</sup> In the context of crime policy, this means that if we reduce human beings to crime trends, we can then do whatever we wish to the generators of crime statistics. When human behavior is aggregated into trends, we can easily neglect the specific social and cultural conditions which have produced millions of criminals.

In the end, however, crime control can only be truly effective if we face the specific conditions that produce adolescent deviants like Chucky D.

A principal cause of adolescent deviance is serious child abuse. Harsh socialization has the same effects on children in so-called primitive (non-western, nonliterate) societies as it has on children in industrialized societies like the United States.<sup>6</sup> Every predatory, self-destructive Fremont Hustler who is enmeshed in burglary, robbery, car theft, carjacking, and drug peddling has been reared by drug-addicted, violent parents, many of whom are convicted felons.<sup>7</sup>

The standard crime explanations criminologists offer have to do with poverty, joblessness, and structural inequalities between the "haves" and "have-nots." The truth is, adolescents don't kill one another because they are unemployed or because they have black or brown skin. Poverty never made Chucky D beat anyone with a baseball bat nor forced Skizzy to steal a boy's athletic jacket and slash the victim's stomach just for fun. These acts require a choice. Gang boys who shoot and stab people have made the wrong choices. This choice isn't the result of being poor; it's the result of being sick. And should you look deeply into these boys' families, you'll find these violent kids to be like their parents.

Why has it been so difficult for criminologists, judges, social workers, and politicians to say publicly and loudly that parents must be stopped permanently from beating children?<sup>8</sup> Facing serious parental abuse and neglect and then doing something about it is quicksand for politicians and would force scholars out of hiding. Instead of the simple truth, politicians tell voters, and scholars tell one another, that adolescent deviance and youth gangs are caused by racial marginalization, structural victimization,<sup>9</sup> weak ties to legitimate institutions, inadequate opportunities, and subcultural learning.

These are traditional scholarly aphorisms: they injure no one, help no one. The smart way to stop a parent from beating a child black-and-blue is to remove a battered child from that parent's custody. The imprudent choice, at least for the protection of a battered child, is to fund yet another "parenting" program. Kids who are beaten need security, protection, and treatment. Adults who beat kids need to be in a prison cell, not on a therapist's couch. It's that simple.

We know how to stop child abuse. How do we stop racial marginalization? Show me a step-by-step action plan that will end structural victimization. Line up and then count all of the community members in

your town who are welcoming into their "marginal" groups. The line scribe in detail how s stop the detrimental

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your town who are willing to spend evenings and weekends tutoring and welcoming into their own homes "high-risk" children from "racially marginal" groups. The line will be short. And, finally, will someone please describe in detail how state or federal government officials are supposed to stop the detrimental effects of subcultural learning?

When it comes to racial justice, the United States has a problematic record. In the last one hundred years, Native Americans were slaughtered on American soil by federal government fiat, and, before that, businessmen sold and bought slaves in what is now midtown Kansas City, Missouri. Today's version of racism (a worldview that sorts some people from other people with the use of glib and convenient rationalizations) allows the overlords of the criminal justice system to imprison hundreds of thousands of minority offenders and, at the same time, to let children starve in households where parents barter food stamps for drugs.

In the last century the federal government, unfettered by loyal Americans, allowed soldiers to slaughter Native Americans, exiled the survivors to reservations, and imprisoned in Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) jails Native American parents who spoke native languages to their children. The BIA is still a federal monument to racial marginalization and gross social injustice developed and implemented by the federal government.

The criminal justice system is today's version of government self-interest. Given the track record of state and federal government officials, I wouldn't take seriously any plan to fix structural victimization or racial marginalization. Be realistic: how would any political party reconstruct the socioeconomic fabric of America?

Politicians have no real plans to achieve social and economic parity for minority groups or anyone else on the fringes of American society. But elected officials talk about it, especially near election time, and policymakers spend billions of tax dollars on social development and criminal justice programs whose alleged intent is to improve the lives of marginal folks. Even a cursory reading of the cross-cultural literature on politics and economics tells us that all societies, from simple to complex, have marginal people. Marginality is a natural occurrence in human cultures.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, state and federal programs offer fantasy images of social justice, which in reality tender thousands of jobs for citizens employed in the prison-industrial complex and allied businesses.<sup>11</sup> As I see it, many jobs in the prison industry, in law enforcement, and in lucrative, though

fundamentally valueless, anticrime programs like DARE, would be unnecessary if parents were adequate caretakers of children.

We can stop parental abuse, but we don't. And we have plenty of excuses for not doing so: crowded family courts, overworked social workers, limited budgets, corrupt foster care, and the ultimate conservative battle cry—"protecting the family" at all costs. I have seen child abuse over and over again. If I can see it, why can't the policymakers and judges? If I can see adolescent drug dealers and prostitutes, why can't their parents? More important, why don't their parents do something to stop their children's illegal and self-destructive behavior?

Scholars and politicians of all colors have been guaranteeing their own paychecks while boys and girls are beaten, sexually molested, and allowed to sell drugs and themselves on the streets. Government paychecks can be accepted with a clear conscience only if black-and-blue boys and girls are ignored in favor of colorless crime statistics.<sup>12</sup> Until criminologists learn how to translate the statistics of crime into visual images that have impact on policymakers' likelihood of being (re)elected, criminology will have a minor role in crime policy.

Crime intervention may not work well, because it is based on incomplete social science and on interventionists' romantic notions of how to save the poor. Like Bourgois, I feel no need to forgive violent people for injuring victims and inflicting pain.<sup>13</sup> Poverty, marginalization, and lack of education are bad apologies for violence. I do, however, feel the need to lift the blame for deviance and crime from the shoulders of "poverty," "racism," and "marginalization" and put it where it belongs. It belongs on the shoulders of parents. If parents did their jobs well, kids would stay in school and wouldn't grow up hating anyone. Well-educated, unbiased kids wouldn't find themselves on the social and economic margins of America.

### Ethnography as I See It

Ethnography is the systematic collection of observations and interview data.<sup>14</sup> The data we collect in ethnographic research are, for the most part, not the same as the data collected by survey researchers, who use self-report crime surveys and so-called in-depth or intensive interviews. I have little patience with researchers who call a thirty-minute interview

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"in-depth" or "intensive." No one, especially a criminal, would divulge innermost secrets to a stranger, even a stranger offering a fee, for a conversation that lasts less time than a Sesame Street episode.

Gaining rapport is a prerequisite to interviewing. There are levels of rapport. We are familiar with levels of rapport from dating experiences. What you see and hear and learn about someone on a first date is a far cry from what you know after a year. Good research, like dating that leads to choosing a marriage partner, takes time, patience, and endurance. Criminals conceal and distort information about themselves. How many "nice guys" turn out to be batterers and date rapists? The truth is, it takes time, as well as deception and "impression management" on the part of a researcher,<sup>15</sup> to study the liars and manipulators we call criminals.

Gathering data in what ethnographers calls "white-room" interviews—that is, in the researchers' environment, not the criminals'—takes very little time and commitment on the part of a researcher. Ethnographers don't work that way. When we enter a scene, we stay there, for months or years. I met two core members of the Fremont Hustlers in July 1994 and spent seven days a week, ten to twelve hours a day, for six weeks with them in June and July 1995. I then hung out with them two to three times a month, for three to four days at a time, for more than a year. The days we spent together were long, almost never less than ten hours; sometimes the days lasted fourteen hours. We hung out on porches and in rental houses and apartments, stood on sidewalks and in convenience stores, drove in cars to kill time or get a thrill by cruising in enemy gang territory. When they sold drugs and used them, I was there. When they were high and decided to shoot off their handguns, rifles, shotguns, and assault weapons, I was there. When they tried to assault and steal things from other kids, I was there and often intervened to stop it.

No ethnographer worth his or her salt would believe for a moment that informants' words spoken in thirty-minute, white-room interviews are even close to being sufficient to understand the complexities of and motivations for real-life behavior. But the discipline of criminology is founded on the idea that data collected with scientifically constructed samples and survey instruments are more valuable to the study of crime and criminals' behavior than detailed ethnographic narratives about real-life behavior. Sounds strange, but it's true.

Doing ethnography has its advantages; but it has real disadvantages

and ethical dilemmas, which have caused me to have nightmares. It's difficult to know informants as real people. I know as I sit there talking to them, sharing their lives from day to day and winning their trust, that I will write unflattering things about their behavior. Criminologists don't have this problem.

I question my own motives late at night, after I have returned from being immersed in poverty, from being surrounded by teenagers high on drugs and pregnant teenage girls who smoke marijuana, and from having seen black-and-blue toddlers who were beaten for one stupid reason or another by an angry gang boy or one of the toddler's mother's lovers. I watch, doing nothing, knowing that if I interfere I will harm my rapport with my informants, or, worse yet, I will end up black and blue myself. So I let the awfulness of gang life happen all around me, because I want to collect data, publish another book, get another salary increase, improve my life.

Ethnographers who study crime and criminals face decisions that influence their own—as well as their informants'—lives and personal safety. Should I report the names of Fremont drug dealers to the police? Should I report abusive parents (gang members who abuse their children) to social service agencies? I once had a senior Kansas City police official whom I met at a gang conference ask me questions about the illegal activities of the Fremont Hustlers. He said that if I were arrested with gang members who were selling rock cocaine and marijuana and carrying firearms I could call him and he'd see to it that I was released from jail without charges being filed. "That's great," I thought, "but what's the price?"

Genuine ethnography, spending six months to a year with informants in natural settings, effects a sort of "marriage" between a researcher and the researched. When I commit myself to a neighborhood and its people, that commitment obtains the right to see things other researchers never see, ask questions others never ask, get answers others never get. But that privilege has a dark side. That dark side is the personal damage that seeing kids in pain who inflict pain on others has caused me. I see child abuse and teenage prostitution, drug addiction and drug dealing, and have even heard murder contracts and street-to-prison drug smuggling being arranged over the phone. For this privilege I pay a heavy price.

At night when my eyes close I see the horrible scenes of the day. I ask myself, "To get this story written, how much of my soul do I have to sell?"

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### An Ethnographer

Philippe Bourdieu wrote that "[c]riminologists are frightened to be associated with criminals with the hope of acquire for me a truth.

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I have no answer. To this day, the nightmares continue. But guilt is cheap, and anguish, however real, is the comforting swamp of morality. My research and my bad dreams are worth it only if my writing results in a better life for these people. But that's not up to me.

### An Ethnographer Looks at Criminology

Philippe Bourgois, a street ethnographer and an anthropologist, wrote that “[c]ollege-educated intellectuals are usually too elitist or too frightened to be capable of treating unemployed, drug-addicted, violent criminals with the respect and humanity that ethnographic methods require for meaningful dialogue to occur.”<sup>16</sup> It takes courage to tell the truth.

The data of any social science are words and behaviors. But collecting accurate and truthful data depends in large part on the social setting. Imagine, if you will, a famous cultural anthropologist like Margaret Mead flying a plane full of native people from highland New Guinea to a “human behavior laboratory” in New York City and then writing a book about New Guineans’ behavior and culture. Imagine also that, because of Mead’s reputation as world-class scholar and anthropologist, professionals and the public automatically accept what she says about these New Guineans as truth.

Criminological theories are abstract constructions about behavior that criminologists have, for the most part, never seen. What criminologists know about crime and criminals has come from studying criminals in captivity (jails, prisons) and from crimes reported, though frequently not observed, by local police and other law enforcement agents. The validity of criminological theories is then tested with measurements (statistics) collected by instruments (surveys, interviews) used on criminals who have been removed from native environments. This sanitized style of studying criminals and crime has brought us dozens of criminological theories and dozens more strategies to intervene in criminal behavior. If any of these theories were correct and interventions effective, we wouldn’t need so many of them.

Criminologists think of themselves as social scientists (with emphasis on “scientist”); however, they are unlike “real” scientists, the physicists, the chemists, the geneticists, the engineers who create experiments

and replicate experimental results over and over. Criminologists can't perform real scientific experimentation with human beings; instead, they insist on scientific objectivity. They use random samples and statistical methods rather than nonrandom samples and narratives as ethnographers do. And it's the ethnographers' use of nonrandom samples and their personal involvement with informants that causes criminologists to disqualify ethnographers as scientists and to devalue ethnographic analyses as fundamentally flawed and useless. To many criminologists, ethnography is anecdotal and entertaining reading but little else. From here, many criminologists go on to claim that insights into the causes of crime and crime intervention based on ethnographic data are unfit for use in anticrime policies.

Can you imagine the irrationality of a social science that proclaims that knowing criminals well is less useful than not knowing criminals at all? I can. This is the essence of sociology and social psychology. And it's this style of research that perpetuates the company store.<sup>17</sup>

As "crime experts," criminologists report crime trends to politicians and policymakers, who then use these numbers to manipulate taxpayers' perceptions of crime by claiming that, for instance, longer prison terms do in fact make for safer streets. But when it comes to what criminals actually do, and why criminals do those things, criminologists' rendering of reality is, in fact, based largely on guesses about behavior. Yet, because the cost and scope of grounded policies likely to do any good are too great, policymakers who don't *want* to know anything more than crime trends accept these guesses. Consequently, when crime policies are developed and implemented, these policies usually fail. They fail because a vision of crime conjured in the computer laboratory is a long way from drug houses and from households where preschoolers are transformed into predators.

### The Company Store

Criminologists who advise criminal justice officials, mayors and governors, and state and federal government leaders are very happy to keep a safe distance from flesh-and-blood criminals. The reality is that many criminologists and criminal justice practitioners don't care whether or not crime control programs make better lives for anyone but themselves.

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The bottom line is the governmental paycheck, and ensuring that the paycheck continues to come.

A fundamental irony in the criminal justice system thus emerges: if the criminal justice system did lower rates of street crime and rehabilitate offenders, hundreds of thousands of well-paid public servants and consultants, like myself, would be put out of work.

When the West was being conquered, railroad companies had company stores. Laborers did back-breaking labor all day to earn a low wage, which was then spent at the company store to purchase the goods needed to survive so that they could do more back-breaking work tomorrow. The company profits; the laborers toil. America's criminal justice system works the same way.

Taxpayers employed outside the criminal justice system work hard and pay taxes. These taxes support an ever-expanding, albeit largely ineffective, criminal justice system. But, at the same time, taxpayers are frightened by public servants into believing that because crime rates are skyrocketing and streets are unsafe (both allegations are false),<sup>18</sup> more tax dollars are needed to expand the criminal justice system. Of course, those public servants' incomes depend on the fears of the taxpayers. In the end, taxpayers lose: the criminal justice system expands, more jobs are offered to new company employees, more tax dollars are invested, and the quality of other publicly funded services (schools, roads, parks) diminishes.

How can this happen? It's simple. The primary goal of any institution (in this case, the criminal justice system) is its own continued well-being. And to ensure that well-being a lack of true accountability is maintained at key positions in the criminal justice system. Mind you, the company store (the criminal justice system and its benefactors) needs to keep itself open. Here is how accountability operates, or doesn't operate, in the criminal justice system.

Accountability has two parts. First, accountability ensures that the goods and services allegedly generated by state and federal government agencies are actually produced and delivered. Second, accountability enables this production and delivery system to be changed, if necessary, by modifying the system itself and replacing ineffective staffers and policies with effective ones.

Think carefully about accountability in a criminal justice system whose stated purpose is to reduce crime and rehabilitate offenders. Say a

juvenile court judge releases a fourteen-year-old killer to the street, arguing that this young predator needs "another chance." Back on the street the youngster kills someone else. Does the judge lose her or his job? Does a state's attorney prosecute the judge for knowingly contributing to the death of the victim? Can the victim's relatives file a wrongful death civil suit against the judge, requesting a remedy of compensatory and punitive damages for the loss of a family member? Will the community organize a recall election and push the judge off the bench? Of course not.

Say a social worker overlooks an abused child and leaves the preschooler with an abusive, neglectful mother who continues deliberately to maim the child. Will the social worker lose his or her job? Is that social worker charged with a crime by the state's attorney? Is that social worker fired? Of course not.

Say crime rates soar in the inner city of Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Detroit, Cleveland, Minneapolis, Miami, or any other American city. Is that city's police chief fired? Is the mayor expelled from office in a recall election? Of course not. These officials will simply ask some other politician, perhaps the president of the United States, for a few hundred of the one hundred thousand more police officers President Clinton promised taxpayers in the 1997 State of the Union address.

Say a prison warden oversees an institution with two thousand male inmates, most of whom are members of violent street gangs and who, once released, continue to slaughter citizens. Is the warden of that prison fired, reprimanded, or reassigned because he or she didn't effect some miraculous cure on these criminals? Of course not.

Say elected state and federal officials pass bills allowing the construction of hundreds of new prisons at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars. And once these institutions are filled to the brim, the streets are no safer than they were before these prisons were constructed. Do these publicly elected officials resign out of shame? Do they voluntarily relinquish their retirement benefits as compensation for wasting tax dollars? Do the voters seek a social remedy, such as imprisonment, for these officials who mismanaged public funds? Of course not.

Where, then, in the criminal justice system do we find genuine accountability? We don't. We don't because criminal justice officials design and operate the company store, are recipients of its benefits, and, as such, don't allow themselves to be held accountable. The worst that can hap-

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pen to a lousy politician or police chief is to be voted out or kicked out of office. Should that happen, she or he will receive retirement and other benefits and go fishing. American workers toil, criminals get arrested, criminal justice officials and politicians reap the profits.

To be sure, any elected officials who told the public the truth about the criminal justice system would lose the public trust and would without doubt lose a re-election as senator, representative, mayor, or governor. Imagine for a moment a candidate for governor saying these words in a speech delivered at a political rally: "Prisons have not and will not stop criminals from committing crimes. We are imprisoning too many people and compounding this error by imprisoning at a very high cost convicted criminals whose crimes are not a threat to public safety. Drug dealers, purveyors of marijuana, cocaine, heroin, for instance, would not be a problem to the community if working people—that's right, taxpaying citizens who are the community's blue-collar and white-collar workers—stopped smoking marijuana, shooting and snorting heroin, and inhaling cocaine! We must shorten prison terms for drug peddlers and send fewer of them, not more of them, to prison." Social science tells us these words are for the most part true, but these words also are a prescription for a lost election.

I hung out on the streets of Kansas City for a long time. Never once did I see a city official other than gang detectives in the Fremont neighborhood. No social workers, no elected politicians, no criminologists ever walked around talking to the gang members and their parents about school, vocational training, and medical care for pregnant teenagers. The only way for these kids to obtain an education, job training, and medical services was to commit a crime and go to jail. And so the company store perpetuates itself for the good of the educated elite.

No one cares what academics write to one another in articles published in refereed journals. Few people outside the company store read these journals. The dilemma arises when criminologists' opinions are wrong and still are used to develop crime policies and intervention programs. Worse yet, the company store shields mistakes and perpetuates them. If one hundred prisons have not stopped criminal behavior, then politicians tell taxpayers we need one hundred more prisons, rather than rethinking the use of prisons as a crime intervention and rehabilitation device.

So many American families now depend on the company store for in-

come that an economic panic would hit the land if someone actually had the "cure" for crime. Crime means jobs for practitioners, tenure for professors, books published by authors, political speeches, and lucrative contracts for anyone who can weasel his or her way into the company store. In the end, what works to end or slow crime doesn't matter. What matters is who gets and controls the anticrime money.

Those whose livelihoods depend on criminals will deny these accusations vehemently, no doubt in loud voices. But the test of devotion comes when the funding ends. How many intervention do-gooders and crime researchers find new areas of study when the company store closes its doors by denying a university researcher a federal grant?

### Who's the Pimp?

A pimp brokers something of value (sex), which belongs to someone else (the prostitute), to a third party (the "john"). Pimping, some people would say, is immoral because the service being sold is sex. Selling sex doesn't bother me. To me, pimping is immoral because pimps receive a greater return at lower risk than the prostitutes. Plain and simple, pimping is capitalist exploitation.

I am a pimp, of sorts. I sell a product (tales about criminals) to those who have never seen criminals up close. Selling the painful experiences of other people has made me a tenured professor and author of two well-known books, with a third book forthcoming which will exploit the Fremont Hustlers.<sup>19</sup> I have transformed gang life into narratives that educate and entertain readers. My work has benefited some Fremont gang members more than others, but, in the end, I will benefit the most.

I am not the only university professor who has pimped or is currently pimping research subjects. Everyone of us who has bought into the company store benefits more than our research subjects. Plain and simple, we are pimps.

There are limits to what I sell, however. In my ethnography about street criminals and youth gangs I create a picture of these people and the things they do. Fremont kids do illegal things: they sell rock cocaine, bags of marijuana, "dank sticks" (cigarettes dipped into a mixture of PCP diluted, or cut, with either formalin, brake fluid, or nearly pure alcohol); burglarize houses and sell and buy the property, such as drugs and weapons,

garnered from burglaries; engage in stolen weapons. But all. What bothers me ethnographic narrative main neutral, offer facior from public view? criminal cases filed a the ethnographic narrative, or create an inequality, and racism? members have shared brought? What should nas me to testify against

### Forgive Me Someo

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garnered from burglaries; buy stolen vehicles to be used in drive-by shootings; engage in shootings; commit armed assaults and homicide with stolen weapons. But writing about these activities doesn't bother me at all. What bothers me most is the image of these kids I will create in my ethnographic narrative. Will I create loathsome characters? Or will I remain neutral, offer facts about their lives, but conceal their awful behavior from public view? A few Fremont Hustlers have killed people, beaten criminal cases filed against them, and now freely walk the streets. In the ethnographic narrative, do I transform these killers into despicable people, or create an image of them as victims of poverty, structural inequality, and racism? Do I mention details about crimes which Fremont members have shared with me for which criminal charges have not been brought? What should I do if the Kansas City Police Department subpoenas me to testify against a Fremont Hustler?

### Forgive Me Someone for I Have Sinned

Criminologists do "clean" lab research, wearing the white coat of science. We street ethnographers "get our hands dirty." Both of these types of research have their own ethical issues. Truthfully, I don't think either research style is entirely right or wrong. Each has its own advantages, limitations, and disadvantages. I do think, however, that it is the responsibility of the researcher to make certain that his or her audience knows these dilemmas and shortcomings and is conscious of the tension between different styles of research. I don't think that's being done. But, in the end, it's the pimping, or publishing, of crime narratives and crime statistics that's truly immoral.

At a multiday conference on juvenile crime, a panel of invited presenters was paid five hundred dollars each for a short presentation. At dinner after the first day, one of my colleagues said that each of the six people at the table should donate his or her honorarium to the representative of a particularly interesting youth program operating in one of America's most troubled inner cities. What an idea. We stared at one another, wondering who would do it. My outspoken colleague said he would stand up the next day in front of an auditorium full of hundreds of distinguished presenters and guests and ask each presenter to relinquish his or her honorarium. He was serious, but we talked him out of doing it, knowing that

the presenters would look at him as if he were crazy. In the end, he would have been embarrassed and ridiculed. Of course each one of us kept our honorariums and had good reasons to do it. One person said bills needed to be paid; another that his spouse would "kill" him if he came home without a check.

My three books and the journal articles, newspaper and magazine stories, and book chapters I've written about gangs and prisons are "stock" in the company store. But I tell myself, at least in my book about the Fremont Hustlers, I will be writing about adolescents doing horrible things to one another and maybe that book will effect some change, someday. Perhaps that effort will balance the immorality.

It may be unrealistic to think this way, but personally I am hopeful that my writing about real life will change the climate of crime control, at least in a small way, so that the lives of some of the Fremont Hustlers will improve. And if their lives can't be improved now, let's hope the lives of their children will be better. Winning the hearts and minds of conservatives and their children is one of my main goals. If winning over these policymakers means spending years watching the pain of others and more years writing about it, then I'll do it. But until then, I will preach to my students about their responsibilities as parents and as criminal justice practitioners and teach them as well about the horror of child abuse and the desperation of life on the street.

Since I began studying the Fremont Hustlers in 1995, I have sworn to colleagues over and over again that I'll never again do another long-term study of delinquents on the street because it's too painful for me to watch them suffer. But when I think about leaving behind street research, I feel as if I will abandon the teenagers who trusted me by sharing the details of their lives. I owe them something. At least I can return to see them, feed them, and offer advice when they're arrested and jailed. These are small things to offer, but these gestures help me sleep more peacefully.

### Notes

This essay benefited from the advice of H. Russell Bernard (University of Florida), Nancy McKee (Washington State University), and Jill Seymour (Binghamton University). The opinions expressed in the essay are mine and do not reflect the opinions and policies of any local, state, or federal law enforcement agency.

1. See Steven Donziger and Mark S. Fleisher, "How to I

2. See Mark S. Fleisher, "How to I City," *Valparaiso Law Review*

3. This expression means: Are we willing to forgive the child she was abused by his or her mother or father's abuse of a child? Are we willing to forgive the child's parents? I am absolutely unwilling to forgive anyone under any circumstances. I am not talking about abused children.

4. In my forthcoming book (University of Wisconsin Press), I describe the lives of the Fremont Hustlers at the college.

5. This expression means:

6. Ronald P. Rohner, *The Psychology of Rejection* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1968) and *Personality* (Chicago: Aldine De Gruyter, 1968).

7. Terence Thornberry, "The Treatment of Children Reported as Victims of Youth Violence," *Journal of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention* (1994).

8. One anonymous reviewer of this journal article criticized this sentence: "The child who is declared right and left, totally without evidence is] everybody is afraid to grant the child a hearing, he/she would have been abused; crime, on the other hand, is a biological and criminological phenomenon. Childhood socialization has its effects on the child's life." (p. 100)

9. Philippe Bourgois, "Apartheid," *American Anthropologist*

10. Robert B. Edgerton, *The Decline of the American Family* (New York: Free Press, 1992)

11. Donziger, *Real War*

12. Since the decline of the manufacturing jobs have moved overseas with the service and information economy. The justice agencies have too little

1. See Steven Donziger, *The Real War on Crime* (Harper Perennial, 1995), and Mark S. Fleisher, "How to Break the Criminal Lifestyle," *USA Today Magazine*, in press.

2. See Mark S. Fleisher, "Guns, Drugs, and Gangs: Kids on the Streets of Kansas City," *Valparaiso Law Review* 31, in press.

3. This expression means "to understand everything is to forgive everything." Are we willing to forgive the violent behavior of a teenage criminal just because he or she was abused by his or her parents? And then are we willing to forgive a mother's or father's abuse of a child because we know that parent was abused by his or her parents? I am absolutely unwilling to forgive egregious violence inflicted on children by anyone under any circumstances. There can never be an acceptable reason to damage children.

4. In my forthcoming book, *Dead End: Lives of Urban Gang Kids* (University of Wisconsin Press), I describe in detail my failing effort to pull one adolescent girl out of the Fremont Hustlers and guide her into an alternative school and community college.

5. This expression means "I'm a man: I find nothing human foreign to me."

6. Ronald P. Rohner, *They Love Me, They Love Me Not: Worldwide Study of Parental Rejection* (New Haven, Conn.: HRAR Press, 1975); Robert A. LeVine, *Culture, Behavior, and Personality* (Chicago: Aldine, 1973).

7. Terence Thornberry wrote: "Sixty-nine percent of youths who had been mistreated as children reported involvement in violence as compared to 56 percent of those who had not been maltreated . . . a history of maltreatment increases the chances of youth violence by 24 percent" ("Violent Families and Youth Violence," Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Fact Sheet #21 [December 1994]).

8. One anonymous reviewer of this chapter was terribly angered by my writing and criticized this sentence in particular. The reviewer wrote, "[D]eclarations are declared right and left, totally without evidence. . . . [One of the declarations offered without evidence is] everybody knows that the cause of crime is child abuse, but everybody is afraid to grant this obvious fact." Had the reviewer read the entire paragraph, he/she would have read that I wrote "deviance" is an outcome of parental abuse; crime, on the other hand, is a sociolegal classification of behavior. Decades of anthropological and criminological research have clearly shown that harsh childhood socialization has its effect in adolescent and adult deviance (see n. 7).

9. Philippe Bourgois, "Confronting Anthropology, Education, and Inner-City Apartheid," *American Anthropologist* 98 (1996): 249-58.

10. Robert B. Edgerton, *Sick Societies: Challenging the Myths of Primitive Harmony* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

11. Donziger, *Real War*, chap. 3.

12. Since the decline in manufacturing over the last twenty years, industrial jobs have moved overseas where labor is cheap, and America has shifted to a service-and-information economy. Many employees of today's prisons and other criminal justice agencies have too little education for the high-tech industry. Because manu-

facturing jobs are scarce, these workers moved into secure positions in criminal justice agencies. In the state of Illinois, the only criteria for a job as a correctional officer in a state prison are a GED and no criminal history. If it weren't for state prisons, where would these men and women find secure jobs with medical benefits and a retirement plan? See Marvin Harris, *Why Nothing Works* (New York: Touchstone, 1981), for an anthropological interpretation of the economics of American life.

13. Bourgois, "Confronting Anthropology," 249-58.

14. This research technique has spawned a number of classic studies of American urban life. These include the following: Elijah Anderson, *Streetwise: Race, Class, and Change in an Urban Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Elliot Liebow, *Tally's Corner* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967); James Spradley, *You Owe Yourself a Drunk: An Ethnography of Urban Nomads* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970); William F. Whyte, *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943).

15. H. Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Cultural Anthropology* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1994), 136-37.

16. Bourgois, "Confronting Anthropology," 249.

17. Actually, though, the statistical outcomes and scientific persona of criminology are just window dressing. Citizens' fear of crime and revenge toward criminals perpetuate the company store, just as fear and revenge led to the extermination of Native Americans. "Crime control" is today's version of "conquering the West." Criminology helps make fear and revenge look modern, legitimate, and antiseptic.

18. Donziger, *Real War*.

19. See Fleisher, *Dead End*.

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