

**BOOK REVIEW:**

**THE NEW PRIMER IN RADICAL CRIMINOLOGY: CRITICAL  
PERSPECTIVES ON CRIME, POWER AND IDENTITY (3RD ED.)  
BY MICHAEL LYNCH, RAYMOND MICHALOWSKI AND  
BYRON GROVES 2000, PP.225, NEW YORK U.S.A: CRIMINAL  
JUSTICE PRESS**

**Francis Otiato\***

Every academic writer always aims at reaching out not only to the professionals but also to beginning students in the discipline. Lynch, Michalowski and groves' A primer in Radical Criminology is a readable, provocative and informative work. It presents among the reliable and most extensive summaries of radical views to date in a logical and understandable language to beginners.

The first edition of this book published about two decades ago has not only grown on the number of pages-initially 125 to current 225 of the text in 3rd edition but has also introduced new chapters to clarify or expand explanations in the first two editions, including materials omitted. This confirms the growth of radical criminology. Although the number of pages has increased, the book has still remained thin but straight to the required features for the lecturers not to be troubled by time restrictions as invariably encountered with other books- though good but overloaded with complicated theories to learners. Some of these texts concentrate only on one or some other ideological viewpoint, and this overlooks the deep multidisciplinary nature of

\* **Texas Southern University**

crime and delinquency theory. For example, many criminological books introduce only sociological theories, or, when other theories are explored, they are given short coverage. This text, though small, is extensive and multi-disciplinary in its scope with very good representation of the policy implications of the theories. The first half of the book provides detailed coverage of traditional criminology mainly relying on Marxist social theory- grounded on political economy, inequality and power. This acclaimed textbook insightfully shows the growth of radical criminology from the early predominant class relations and embraces the problem of crime in relation to race, gender, culture, and history as intersecting focus behind relationships (pp. 19-36). In each topic area, the radical view is compared with other approaches. For example, the radical 'social harm' understanding of crime is compared with consensus - oriented comprehension that ignores the role of power in the discriminating use of the law to behavior (pp. 39-44). In crime causation section, the writers contrast control and community disorganization theories, with radical theories on traditional crime (pp.99-106) Although Lynch and his co- writers recognize the heterogeneity of methods coming under the rubric of radical criminology, they carefully abstain from lengthy analysis of inconsistencies among critical, dialectical and socialist viewpoints in favor of focusing on the underlying ideas and leading bearings familiar to them all. Learners and teachers intrigued into definite details of Marxist are directed to the relevant references.

A dilemma with Lynch, Michalowski and Groves' discussion of Marxist theory includes the idea of the dielectric (p.32). Dialectical study is presented as a cautionary model to analyze various viewpoints, to think historically, and contextually, and to link ideas and practice. The author's try this important point in both a complete explanation of instrumental and structural theories of the government. Instrumentalism (pp. 45-58), with its deterministic understanding of

the capitalist state as simply the regulatory arm of the bourgeoisie, is rejected in support of the most controversial structuralism understanding of the sovereignty of the state and the law from ruling class control. Structural improvements to the necessary aspect of the state must come to function as a sort of protection web for Marxism, catching those situations that appear to run counter to the assumption that the upper class is a ruling class. Marxist theory is thereby shielded from disconfirmation because instrumentalist detachments absorb all the blame. However, is there not an element of intellectual bad faith in such efforts to shield Marxism from itself? The book's portrayal of the dual role of advocates in modern capitalist communities explains the dilemma of dielectric- structural analysis: protector of the poor; supporters of corporate capitalistic system and champion of the lower classes constitutional rights. If this is dialectical analysis, then who needs radical criminology? The structural Marxism introduced in this book is nearly equal to pluralist conflict theory (pp. 48-58). Authors need to be more explicit about the circumstances under which the instrumental viewpoints apply and more fundamentally, about the arguments for rejecting radical versions of criminal justice in favor of acceptable alternatives.

The same predicament arises in a different form in a differently compelling description of the foundations of traditional crime. Whilst acknowledging that radical criminology has been criticized for side stepping etiological issues, the writers maintain that such critiques are restrained by contemporary radical study on traditional crime. In order to incorporate much of this work, though; they are forced to expand their already permissive thought of radical research almost beyond comprehension. For example, the authors claim that like chemists, radical criminologists can make accurate predictions concerning the behavior of social bodies made up of individuals and conclude that Barlow and Barlow's' research on inequality and violence among others relied explicitly on Marxian predictions (p. 82). In general, Lynch and colleagues

are too quick to turn limited points of compatibility or consistency between radical criminology and traditional etiological perspectives into grounds for major theoretical integration. Control and community disorganization perspectives are emphasized over strain perspectives. Cultural theory is not discussed, even for purposes of critique. The flaws in the radical view are most glaring in the new primer analysis of policy and social change in the last chapter. They insist that radicals are not unwilling to embrace liberal reforms while we wait for a revolutionary transformation of society. Whatever irony is intended in this comment may well be lost on the introductory student and, in addition, begs the question of what particular revolutionary transformations are required to realize the radical vision in criminology.

A particular examination of this issue would necessarily need a study of socialist society, a subject conspicuously absent from the book. The reader is left with the impression that radical criminologists are either uninterested in the problem of crime and justice under socialism –surely a misleading conclusion – or are hesitant to address the problem with the categories and methods of Marxist analysis. The authors quickly conclude that if capitalism is part of the problem of crime and justice then changing capitalism must be part of the solution. Into what should capitalism change? What are the models of change and new social order consistent with the radical analysis and vision championed in this book? On the last page, Lynch and his team ask, “How wise is a wealthy nation that: Accepts millions of people behind bars as the answer to crime when other nations have lower levels of crime and have not relied on prison as the answer? Watches as more than one – third of its children grow up at or near the poverty level? Allows huge gaps income, wealth and social status as an acceptable price for being the most powerful nation on earth? Accepts regular violence against women as an acceptable cost for establishing male superiority? Has institutionalized mechanisms of racial oppression” yet they do not answer

this question, perhaps because doing so would require probing, even transcending the limits of radical criminology. Above all, after going through the book, it is my conclusion that critical criminologists should consider *the new primer* as part of their library. The books overview and radical viewpoint is the best.

