

## Book Review

### **Key Concepts in Crime and Society**

Edited by Ross Coomber, Joseph F Donnermeyer, Karen McElrath and John Scott  
Publisher: Sage  
ISBN: 978-0-85702-256-1  
Price: £20.99

The Key Concepts series of books are billed as a valuable tool for students. Sage is a leading academic publisher and a reliable choice for both introductory and more in-depth resources. The contributors for the *Crime and Society* book in the series are all established academics with varied and extensive knowledge of western criminal justice, having undertaken research and academic work across the United Kingdom, Australia and United States of America.

*Key Concepts in Crime and Society* is an introductory level book with an average of four pages covering each topic. It serves as a good reference aid to be dipped into and prompts thought. The authors state their aim is to provide a critical analysis of each topic; a challenge to achieve whilst remaining informative and retaining an introductory tone. They meet the challenge well. In particular, the sections on 'prisons' and 'alternatives to imprisonment' provoke thought about the success of crime reduction initiatives and the challenges which arise from various aspects of society. Similarly, sections such as 'race/ethnicity and crime' and 'sex work' succeed in prompting thought about sensitive moral concerns and explaining complex issues whilst remaining concise and introductory.

The book is, perhaps unnecessarily, split into three sections; the origins of theoretical and social concepts, different types of crime, and responses to crime. It should be read with the introductory tone in mind so as to prompt further reading and ensure issues are not

misunderstood. This is particularly important with reference to theories such as deterrence and social control where there would be specific benefit of deeper exploration. In a practical sense, definitions are documented throughout the chapters and the contents is easy to follow but the lack of an index and glossary seems odd for a reference book of this nature. References are provided but links to further up-to-date reading would add value.

Although clearly written with students and academic courses in mind the book would prove useful too for managers and keen prison and probation staff as a reference point for key themes which transect our work. Wouldn't it be a great starting point if our new and existing prison officers, for example, were encouraged and enabled to explore 'key concepts' in their work through reading and research? With officer focused initiatives in areas such as safer custody and the 'five-minute intervention' developing at pace such resources as the Key Concepts series might be a complimentary resource for inquisitive criminal justice practitioners at all levels. Topics such as specific types of crime, gangs, prisons, alternatives to imprisonment and policing may prove particularly relevant.

This is a sound choice for an introductory guide to *Crime and Society*. One would be hard pressed to identify any topics missed. The book introduces influential criminologists and sociologists, approaches to research and practice, and provides both historical background and modern insight into current issues and practices. The authors also manage to refer to, and distinguish between differences across continents whilst remaining succinct and clear.

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## Book Review

### **Dangerous Politics: Risk, Political Vulnerability, and Penal Policy**

By Harry Annison  
Publisher: Oxford University Press  
ISBN: 978-0-19-872860-3  
Price: £65.00 (Hardback)

A title like *Dangerous Politics* might be more suggestive of a John Grisham thriller than an academic publication, but with *Dangerous Politics*, Harry Annison has written a thorough and informative account of the construction, system wide effect and then eventual demise of the Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentence in England and Wales—and it also happens to be an accessible and compelling tale to follow.

It draws on over 60 in-depth interviews with key policymakers, to help tell the story of the development and impact of this indeterminate preventative sentence. In so doing, the book looks at the interplay between government, the Civil Service, the judiciary, civic society and indeed all the many and varied factions which directly and tacitly shape policy development. The book helps illustrate the extent to which law making happens, not in a theoretical world of omniscient political masters, but in a real world of flawed and human interactions, media influences and a tumultuous mix of other agendas which all play their part.

This book may be well placed to take advantage of a post E.U. Referendum spike in interest in the process of political decision-making and policy formulation. Indeed parallels between the Referendum and some key aspects of the IPP story: an under-represented public voice, a disregard for the views of academic experts and strong tabloid media pressure; suggest that the themes explored in *Dangerous Politics* really transcend the story of the IPP to speak to factors still extant and thriving in British political life today.