Book Review

Crime prevention: A critical introduction

Karen Evans

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Karen Evans' profile demonstrates an active engagement with matters related to the submission under review. *Crime Prevention: A critical introduction* is well timed appearing as it does at a time of upheaval, in part, as a result of the recent change in the UK government and a global, economic downturn. In addition, terrorism has impacted upon legislation and policing so that immigration and racism have had their profiles raised, largely through news stories and political hyperbole. There is no doubt that Evans' book provides a contemporary and fresh insight into matters relating to crime prevention, an issue that has been a major part of contemporary society in the late twentieth/early twenty-first centuries.

From an introduction that provides a concise overview of the 'crime agenda' in England and Wales in the twentieth century, Chapter 1 identifies the importance of crime prevention through a range of pertinent sub-headings, each of which proffers a brief but pithy examination of its role. Evans has drawn on those seminal works that have been routinely revisited by a number of academics and researchers so that by the end of the chapter, readers will have some idea of the complexities and diversities that have maintained crime prevention in its place high in contemporary political and community agendas.

Chapter 2 provides a timely reminder of the political agenda in the late 1990s following 18 years of Conservatism, a time that saw periods of unrest, increased senses of social exclusion and community disintegration. The landslide success of New Labour in the 1997 general election brought with it an agenda that included social inclusion, community engagement and partnership working, whereas the introduction of the Crime and Disorder Act, 1998 effectively increased conceptions of criminality, deviance and the subsequent controlling of young people.

The relationship between poverty and crime led, under New Labour to the development of policies and practices to regenerate areas in need. Chapter 3 provides a useful and clear exploration of the major tactics deployed by the government of the day and explores the localisation of crime reduction and crime prevention measures. The chapter goes on to further explain and examine the development of partnership working wherein agencies as diverse as police, social services and health had a statutory requirement to work together to identify and address crime and disorder in their local areas.

The focus of Chapter 4 is very much related to 'anti-social' behaviour, a thorny issue which, through its lack of definition by the Home Office at the time of its introduction, potentially widened the net for deviant behaviour and ultimately increased opportunities for criminality. In spite of New Labour's language in the introduction of the Crime and Disorder Act, 1998 and partnership working at community level, centralised managerialism became the order of the day, particularly in relation to youth justice. Furthermore, public services were restructured or introduced in order to address what came to be unpopular, government policies. Chapter 5 adroitly picks up on the youth justice debate introduced in the previous chapter by

focussing on the welfare and criminal justice ideologies of New Labour. The 'problems' of many young people were regarded, by New Labour to result from a number of social ills and the government went on to develop policies and practices so that initiatives such as 'Surestart' were introduced to identify and work with those that were deemed to be 'at risk' of falling into deviant and criminal behaviour. Social control became directed towards these young people and Evans' chapter clearly identifies the political agenda of the day.

Chapter 6 takes the murder of Stephen Lawrence, in the context of racial identity as its opening tactic. Evans goes on to expand on issues of racial identity with her exploration of 'the new racism' as 'Asian communities were portrayed as failing communities rather than those which had been failed' (p. 118) correctly identifying shifts in attitudes towards the BME. The matter of terrorism is also explored in this chapter – in fact, throughout the book Evans manages to give a fresh, concise and accurate perspective on issues that promulgate notions of crime and 'risk' in twenty-first century United Kingdom. The following chapter provides a detailed and contemporary approach to the matter of terrorism in a manner that distinguishes it from much of the literature on this topic that has been produced in the first decade of this century.

Evans' refreshing discussion on 'building cohesive communities' in Chapter 8, neatly draws together many of the topics discussed in preceding chapters, while adroitly identifying some of the shortcomings of New Labour's community cohesion ambitions.

The criminalisation of certain behaviours, new and amended laws that widened the powers of government and law enforcement agencies and the expanding use of punitive sentencing came about in spite of the evidence that crime figures were reducing. Although the rhetoric suggested community cohesion and partnership working, Evans' concluding chapter has succinctly summarised the complex and seemingly divergent relationships between government and representatives of community and national organisations.

This book provides the reader with a well-researched, cogent and concise reflection on a period of turbulence for many groups in the United Kingdom during a period when the rhetoric gave one message, whereas the reality was somewhat different. Young people under New Labour were 'labelled', as Anti-Social Behaviour Orders became 'badges of office' and gangs were increasingly demonised. Perceived problems in economically deprived areas routinely focussed on single parent households, while members of ethnic minorities attracted increasing attention. Increasingly, immigration was focussed on as a contentious issue, increasing a mantle firmly grasped by the coalition government who have argued that Labour had lost control of the issues that were deemed to threaten social cohesion and community engagement.

The title of Evans' book belies its content. This is not just another analysis of crime prevention in the United Kingdom, instead she has taken the topic and defined the impact of crime prevention policies and practices as they have symbolised the subject in the last decade and a half. Every chapter relates to issues that continue to make their presence felt in the populist media but she provides an honest and critical discussion.

It is to be hoped that Karen Evans is, as I write, planning the next instalment of what could be a useful and up-to-date reflection of the true state of crime prevention.

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