

Course Description

It is a truism that crime shapes politics, evident most recently in the ways that terrorism has changed the political landscape. But it is also true that politics shapes crime and criminal justice. A politically conservative administration criminalizes previously legal conduct or increases penalties for existing crimes. The criminal law is a political resource that contributes powerfully to our general understanding of what a particular society values and disparages and to the power relationships within it.

Despite the title of this course, it is not a theory course, though we will certainly be referring to relevant theories. It is, instead, strongly policy-oriented, a course that will look at how politics—both partisan contests and broader ideological and cultural influences—shapes public attitudes towards crime and criminal justice policies. It will deal with such topics as:

- the effects of social movements—the civil rights movement, the women’s movement—on criminal justice.
- the use of criminal prohibitions and sanctions to alter power relationships.
- the role of the media in the politics of crime policy.
- the relationship between macroeconomic policy and criminal justice policy.

If there is a theoretical framework that informs the examination of these issues it is a somewhat modified social constructionist perspective. We will pay particular attention to the rhetorical and symbolic devices that define our crime problems and reactions to them.

I will be spending part of the summer fleshing out the design of this course, so I cannot tell you precisely what we will be reading. But several books that I may use are

- Les Johnston and Clifford Shearing, *Governing Security*
- Katherine Beckett and Theodore Sasson, *The Politics of Injustice*, 2nd edition
- Katherin Beckett, *Making Crime Pay*
- Stuart Scheingold, *The Politics of Street Crime*
- E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters*

For exploration of the constructionist perspective, we will read articles by Joel Best and Jonathan Simon, among others.

We will have guest lecturers for two of the class sessions—one academic and one practitioner. These classes will be held jointly with the students in an honors seminar I will be teaching on the same subject at City College. I’m hoping that these occasions will help to inspire the undergraduates to do graduate work, so you will be role models.