

Reviews

Chris Cunneen & Rob White (2002) *Juvenile Justice: Youth and Crime in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, ISBN 0195512235

Crime in general, and juvenile crime in particular, has come to comprise one of the most pressing questions of social stability and social order within contemporary Western liberal democratic states. The extent to which such concern is legitimate, and the degree to which it can be understood without reference to broader socio-economic formations and political imperatives, introduces a range of questions derived in historical, theoretical, material, political, policy and applied practice contexts.

Why have we become so pre-occupied with crime in modern society? How has juvenile crime become increasingly subsumed within broader (net-widening) discourses embracing 'social disorder' and 'anti-social behaviour'? How do we account for consolidating, widening and deepening patterns of social polarisation and inequality? Why do substantial swathes of the child populations of the most 'advanced' western economies, continue to endure poverty? To what extent can we conceptualise juvenile 'justice' within a context of manifest social 'injustice'? How do complex structural relations — primarily rooted in the intersections of class, 'race' and gender — continue to produce and reproduce patterns of advantage and disadvantage? Why are structural determinants increasingly marginalised within the principal aetiological debates in respect of crime, whilst individual agency, morality and responsibility are correspondingly profiled and emphasised? At a time when universal child welfare continues to recede and appear ever-more remote within 'leading' liberal democracies, how is it that particular constituencies of disadvantaged children and young people are increasingly targeted through expanded interventionist modes of control, surveillance, regulation and, ultimately, punishment? What is the purpose and function of the juvenile justice system?

These questions, and others, flavour the conceptual and analytical context within which Chris Cunneen and Rob White set about critically examining juvenile justice, youth and crime in Australia. Structured in three parts, and comprising thirteen substantive chapters, their book covers an enormous amount of ground. Part 1 -- 'History, Theory and Institutions' — traces the development of formal responses to juvenile crime over two centuries; introduces a range of theoretical lenses through which juvenile crime can be interpreted and conceptualised; and sets out current patterns of juvenile offending and the contemporary shape of the juvenile justice system in Australia. Part 2 — 'The Social Dynamics of Juvenile Justice' — engages with the key structural questions. The primary significance of class, 'race' (particularly in respect of indigenous children and young people in Australia), and gender is sociologically situated, and it is within this middle section that the relation between social (in)justice and criminal (in)justice is so persuasively discussed and developed. Part 3 — 'The State, Punishment, and Community' — picks up on many of the issues signalled and introduced in the opening section of the book, and draws together the key policy and practice responses to children and young people in trouble in

contemporary Australia. Policing; court processes and sentencing powers; community and institutional disposals; preventive strategies and, of course, approaches informed by restorative justice, are clearly explained and critically evaluated.

Juvenile Justice: Youth and Crime in Australia is both descriptive and analytical. It identifies and critically explores the principal sites of contestation, and it carefully examines the tensions, paradoxes and even the contradictions that currently characterise the dominant means of conceptualising, and responding to, juvenile justice and juvenile crime. It is an excellent text book for the student specialising in the study of juvenile crime and juvenile justice, but it is equally valuable as a more generic text within the wider field of critical criminology. Moreover, whilst the book may be conceived as being Australia-specific, it also speaks forcefully and authoritatively to juvenile crime and juvenile justice debates which characterise the nature of scholarly inquiry, policy formation, and practice development far further afield.

Cunneen and White have written an impeccably referenced book which will surely establish itself as a 'must have' introductory text for academic, researcher, student, policy-maker and practitioner alike. *Juvenile Justice* makes an important contribution to sociology, criminology, social policy, law, socio-legal studies, and childhood and youth studies. It is equally valuable with regard to professional education and training, including social work, youth and community work, teaching, legal practice and policing. It will have become apparent already, but I commend this book without reservation to anyone with an interest in *Youth and Crime in Australia* and beyond.

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