Progressive Justice in an Age of Repression
Strategies for Challenging the Rise of the Right

Edited by Walter S. DeKeseredy and Elliott Currie
Progressive Justice in an Age of Repression provides a much-needed engagement with questions of justice and reform within the current phase of global capitalism, one that is marked not only by significant social inequality, but also political bifurcation. It offers guidance on progressive strategies for resistance.

It also extends criminological analysis by situating these contemporary challenges as globalized and inextricably linked to questions of political economy, law, and society. Bringing together an international selection of scholars, this book draws on a range of issues, such as immigration, street crime and the renewed push for “law and order,” violence against women, environmental injustice, assaults on health care and social services, and the unleashing of private corporate exploitation of natural resources. It is a clarion for strategic thinking, a call for action fuelled by informed analysis, and a reimagining of the progressive society that is under attack by Trumpism, populism, and a rising right.

This is an important read for those who teach and study criminology, deviance and social control, social problems, legal studies, political science, and policy studies. It is also a useful resource for practitioners, community-based activists, and policy makers seeking new ways of thinking critically about crime, law, and social control.

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PROGRESSIVE JUSTICE IN AN AGE OF REPRESSION

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The seeds for this book were sown shortly after the November 8, 2016 US presidential election. Like millions of progressives around the world, we were – and rightfully so – greatly alarmed by this event, and we knew that the consequences would be grave. As noted in the Introduction, the rise of right-wing populism is not restricted to the US, which is why we invited scholars from other countries to contribute to this anthology. A key objective of this volume is to provide innovative answers to the question “What is to be done?” Obviously, this volume does not have all the possible solutions, but regardless of which approach you think is best, as critical thinkers, what we do know for sure is what Simon Winlow, Steve Hall, James Treadwell and Daniel Briggs state in their 2015 book Riots and Political Protest: “Things cannot go on as they are.” Hopefully, the world will be a better place when you finish reading this book.

We must first thank our friend and editor Tom Sutton for encouraging us to take on this project. We were also greatly aided by Andrea DeKeseredy and Robert Nicewarner, who spent many hours of their lives reading each manuscript for grammar/spelling and conforming to the required citation and bibliographic style. On top of contributing a chapter to this book, Joseph F. Donnermeyer spent some of his valuable time proofreading some of the chapters.

Needless to say, this book is the product of a collective effort. We would like to give a very special thanks to all our colleagues who took time away from their loved ones, leisure activities, and academic schedules to write innovative chapters for this anthology. It was a pleasure to read their offerings, and we are sure that readers will be inspired by their insights and suggestions for progressive change.

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INTRODUCTION

Responding to repression

Walter S. DeKeseredy

Turning it around: strategies for justice in an age of repression

Six years ago, my good friend and colleague Elliott Currie (2013) published a piece titled “The Sustaining Society” that is still relevant today. In this scholarly book chapter, he states,

I have a lot of friends who have told me lately that they no longer read newspapers. This isn’t because they get their news on the Internet now, but because they can’t stand to read the news at all because the news is so grim.

(p. 3)

A rapidly growing number of people are following suit. Such selective inattention is due, in large part, to a major event that occurred on November 8, 2016 – Donald Trump was elected the 45th President of the United States. One of the key results of what was widely perceived as a highly unlikely victory for Trump is also noted in the above chapter: “a kind of deep resignation – a profound pessimism, even among many progressive people about the possibilities of a better society” (p. 3).

This pessimism is well-founded, given the radical neoliberal policies and laws passed since Trump got elected, and it seems, from a progressive standpoint, that things are getting worse every day. In my own case, I repeatedly hear the phrase “What next?” The movement toward a harsher, more unequal and less secure society, however, is not confined to the United States – though its expression there may be the most extreme and glaring. As Simon Winlow, Steve Hall, and James Treadwell correctly point out in Chapter 2 of this anthology, “right-wing populism has risen significantly across the West.” In many countries of the advanced industrial world, powerful movements are at work that seek to
dismantle long-won protections for working people while tilting social and eco-
nomic resources to those who already enjoy positions of privilege. Harsh demands
for a crackdown on crime and for draconian restrictions have surfaced – and in
some places dominated public discourses – in countries from the UK to France to
Australia and the Netherlands.

Even in Canada, where I was born (I am still a Canadian citizen), there is
growing anti-immigrant sentiment, as reflected by the June 2018 Ontario pro-
vincial election. Right-wing populist Doug Ford was elected Premier by
a landslide, and his thinly veiled racist statement “Ontario has to take care of
our own” garnered him much support. As well, like Donald Trump, Doug
Ford embodies hegemonic masculinity, and there is a very strong relationship
between this type of masculinity and right-wing populism as described by me in
Chapter 1. In fact, you cannot understand the election of these two politicians
without understanding the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Related to this
point is Kimmel’s (2018) empirically based observation that you can’t understand
right-wing extremists, such as those mentioned in Chapter 2, without examining
masculinity and gender:

It is the specific ways that specific groups of men understand and enact
masculinity that help us navigate between the macro and micro, between
the structural and the psychological. It’s within the gendered connection
between humiliation and violence where we will find the key to under-
standing how some young men get into extremist politics and, therefore,
how we, as policy makers, civil and community leaders, parents, religious
leaders, and citizens, can provide a route they can use to get out.

(p. 11)

What Meda Chesney-Lind’s Chapter 9 and mine clearly have in common is
that they both focus heavily on gender, patriarchy, and harmful consequences of
the antifeminist backlash in the US. What makes Chesney-Lind’s offering dis-
tinct, though, is her examination of Trump’s assault on girl’s and women’s
reproductive rights, including abortion. She makes explicit that “it is the most
prominent anti-woman initiative launched by the Trump administration.” Some
feminist criminologists might also consider it a form of state-perpetrated violence
against women. Victoria Collins (2016), one of the world’s leading experts on this
type of state crime, would agree, and asserts that “Women’s bodies and their
lives are subject to different types of violence than that of men” and “the state
has historically sanctioned violence against women in varying forms. Despite
‘progress’ over the centuries, the institution of law has been instrumental in nor-
malizing gender relations that award rights to men and simultaneously deny
these same rights to women” (p. 23).

There is a large criminological literature showing that the state, too, facilitates
corporate criminality, an issue addressed by Gregg Barak in Chapter 7. Here,
following Clinard and Quinney (1973), corporate crimes are defined as “offenses
committed by corporate officials for their corporation and the offenses of the corporation” (p. 159), and what Michalowski (1985) stated over 30 years ago still holds true: “corporate crime represents the most widespread and costly form of crime in America” (p. 325). The same can be said about corporate crime in other parts of the world, such as Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom. For example, some sociologists estimate that the rate of employees dying from unsafe work conditions is more than six times greater than the street crime death rate (DeKeseredy, 2011; DeKeseredy, Ellis, & Alvi, 2005).

Not only does Barak provide striking examples of corporate criminality, but he also makes a compelling case for, as he puts it, “moving beyond those well-worn tinkering efforts in criminal enforcement, regulation or self-regulation, such as enhanced self-monitoring, upgraded ethical conduct, or greater social responsibility.” Will the progressive strategies he proposes ever materialize? Many readers are likely to be skeptical in this current era. The same can be said about numerous readers’ responses to all the leftist initiatives advanced in this book.

We can always us a healthy dose of skepticism, but thus far, there has been much less by way of hard analysis of what has gone wrong in the age of Trump and of tough-minded thinking about what concrete strategies might work to challenge and ultimately reverse these developments. That task has never been more urgent. Actually, what Winlow et al. (2015) state below is one of the key reasons for putting together this anthology:

> It is now incumbent upon the political Left to rejuvenate its discourse and transform itself into something that inspires young people to believe that something better can actually be brought into existence. What the Left really needs is a realistic utopianism, a utopianism that connects a genuine faith that a better world can be connected to a doggedly realistic understanding and appreciation of just how difficult this task is and the scale of the work needed to make it possible.

(pp. 204–205, emphasis in original)

Mass shootings are frequently in the news. They are also associated with gender and masculinity, and these killings are briefly examined by Peter Squires in Chapter 8 and by me in Chapter 1. Indeed, the recent spate of school shootings in the US, the rise of right-wing populism across the globe, and other major social problems spawned by neoliberalism and patriarchy strongly indicate that we are witnessing the latest devastating consequences of the “slow apocalypse” spawned by anti-social capitalism (Harrington, 1989, p. 284). Let's also not forget that it is not only human beings who are experiencing the slow apocalypse. As Rob White describes in Chapter 10, “the existing planetary environment is rapidly being destroyed. This is because the four elements that sustain life – earth, air, water and sun (energy) – are under severe adverse pressures.” Even more environmental harm will occur soon because of the Trump
administration’s major assaults on environmental regulations and moves to open public lands to private exploitation.

Elliott Currie lives in a metropolitan southern California neighborhood, and in his aforementioned “The Sustaining Society” he states that the slow apocalypse exists only a few miles from his house. What is the dominant left-wing response to what Currie (2016) refers to as “ordinary violence” (e.g., predatory street crimes and domestic violence) that plague communities like the one near his residence and in other disadvantaged areas around the world? Unfortunately, in this current era, we are witnessing, in Currie’s (2016) words, a “new brand of idealist complacency” (p. 24). He and other left realists like me and Martin D. Schwartz (see DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2018) worry about the left’s selective inattention to the problem of inner-city violence in the US, especially in dispossessed urban African-American communities. This is troubling, since Chicago reported 781 homicides in 2016, which was this city’s highest number since 1996. There are other US cities that are among the most violent urban areas in the world, including Oakland and Baltimore.

The consequences of this “stunning silence” are alarming. Returning to Currie (2016):

[W]hat is clear is that it results in the ceding of concern about American violence to others whose agendas are usually a lot less progressive, and the implicit tolerance of a level of human suffering and inequality in the likelihood of death that no one should accept – least of all the people who purport to be in the business of studying crime.

(p. 25)

Currie has paid his dues studying ordinary violence, and it is what he appropriately expresses that he knows most about. He also reminds us that “ordinary violence in the 21st century is a human crisis of devastating proportions, one that, like many other contemporary human disasters, is savagely unequal in its impact” (2016, p. 12). What, then, is to be done about such violence in the age of Trump? In Chapter 4, Currie provides much-needed answers to this question, and his solutions are realistic.

Fast-forwarding to Chapter 12, readers will soon discover after reading Sonya Goshe’s offering that she and Currie think alike. Both are deeply concerned about targeting the root causes of ordinary violence and other types of crime. Prime examples of such causes are poverty, unemployment, and child abuse. Goshe’s chapter is yet another progressive reminder that, in her words, “American criminal justice reform is disconnected from its knowledge on root causes of social harm and the depth of punitive norms in a society that does little more than punish to keep people safe.” Like Currie’s contribution to this volume and his earlier work on violence, Goshe’s chapter also sensitizes us to the problem of again travelling down the well-worn path of what Currie (1985) views as “compartmentalizing social problems along
bureaucratic lines” (p. 18). Rarely, if ever, will you find a politician who manages economic problems that contribute to ordinary violence considering how her or his economic decisions could affect crime rates. Nor will you find her or him discussing issues such as factory closures, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), or cuts in benefits for low-income people with politicians responsible for criminal justice issues, or police chiefs or officers. Consequently, many policies are adopted without taking into account the ultimate effect on crime. Thus, police, prison employees, and other criminal justice personnel are called in to “clean up the mess” made by the rest of society (Currie, 1985).

Most of the policies outlined in this book will seem somewhat out of place in a traditional criminology or social problems textbook. For example, many social scientists feel that job creation is a topic that belongs in urban policy, political sociology, or public administration. The problem is that real life does not play itself along the bureaucratic lines set up by universities and government agencies. What you eat can affect how you behave, and the fact that the nutrition department is located in a separate university building from the criminology department does not affect that truth. In real life, jobs, child care, nutrition, welfare, and many other events affect our lives, together and at the same time. It is mainly in textbooks that they are segregated.

I would be remiss if I didn’t state that Alex S. Vitale, author of Chapter 5, also points out the limits of criminal justice reform. More specifically, he focuses on the limits of police reform. As a part of the state, the police are required to serve its interest, and in capitalist countries characterized by much race/ethnic, gender, and class inequality, this means shoring up a harmful status quo. I couldn’t agree more, then, with Vitale’s assessment of the current mode of policing in the US: “As a result, a whole host of liberal police reforms are doomed to failure …. We must look instead to fundamental changes to the police role in society.” Like Currie, Goshe, and the other authors in this volume, Vitale emphasizes the importance of eliminating racism and economic inequality rather than traditional liberal measures such as better training and community policing. In his words: “We don’t need empty police reforms; we need a robust democracy that gives people the capacity to demand of their government and themselves real, nonpunitive solutions to their problems.” Indeed we do!

James Diego Vigil and Nativo Lopez Vigil also examine racism in Chapter 13. This is a timely piece because it addresses the Trump administration’s recent separation of children from their parents as a cruel means to discourage undocumented migrants from seeking refuge in the US. Defined by the American Academy of Pediatrics to be a form of child abuse, the separation of children received much international attention in the summer of 2018 and sparked mass outrage around the world because, as noted by Vigil and Lopez Vigil, it was, to say the least, “morally reprehensible.”

Vigil and Lopez Vigil provide context for the current dire strait of immigration policy in the US, pointing out that although Trump’s language and policies
on immigration have been particularly egregious, they are rooted in choices made by virtually every previous US administration, and the authors also suggest some elements of a progressive strategy to break this self-defeating pattern. One the key points made in their chapter is that “It appears … Trump is desperately searching for an immigration problem that … doesn’t require fixing.”

The authors of Chapter 11, Randy Myers and Tim Goddard, concur with Currie, Goshe, and Vitale. In synch with these four scholars, when it comes to thinking about improving the lives of young people, Myers and Goddard convincingly show us that we need to think “far beyond the justice system” and that they are correct to state that the left “must think about justice for youth rather than youth justice or juvenile justice reform.” But they don’t stop there. Based on their fieldwork with US social justice youth-serving organizations, they show us what youth justice should look like. What is particularly interesting, at least to me, is their call for strategically using neoliberalism to challenge neoliberalism. It is beyond the scope of this Introduction to provide examples, but I’m sure you will find their ideas innovative.

So far, the bulk of the criminological research on violence, drugs, and other types of crime, including corporate criminality, is urban-biased. Ignoring the plight of rural people is not only problematic for political reasons outlined by me in Chapter 1, but also for the fact that rates of rural crime in general may be higher than urban and suburban rates in particular types of rural places and for specific kinds of crimes (Donnermeyer, 2016b; Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2014). We now know this is definitely the case for intimate violence against women in the US and in the Global South (DeKeseredy, in press; DeKeseredy & Hall-Sanchez, 2018). However, rural crime has, until recently, ranked among the least-studied social problems in criminology. As Donnermeyer, Jobes, and Barclay (2006) put it in their review of the extant rural crime literature available at that time:

If rural crime was considered at all, it was a convenient “ideal type” contrasted with the criminogenic conditions assumed to exist exclusively in urban locations. Rural crime was rarely examined either comparatively with urban crime or as a subject worthy of investigation in its own right.

(p. 199)

Joseph Donnermeyer, author of Chapter 3, is a pioneering rural criminologist. Though his contribution is about drugs in rural parts of the US and the rise of Trump, he has a few things in common with Rob White, who is a green criminologist. Defining green criminology is the subject of debate (DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2014), but here, following South and Brisman (2013), it is defined as “the term that criminologists most frequently employ to describe the exploration and examination of causes of and responses to ‘ecological,’ ‘environmental,’ or ‘green’ crimes, harms, and hazards” (p. 2). Six chapters in Donnermeyer’s (2016b) The Routledge International Handbook of Rural Criminology confirm his (2016a) claim that “rural criminology and
green criminology are so tightly intertwined as to make it impossible to ascertain where their respective borders begin, and to what extent those borders, if they exist at all, have any significance” (p. 285). It should be noted that Rob White has a chapter in Donnermeyer’s handbook and that many severe green crimes occur in rural communities, as documented by a rapidly growing body of interdisciplinary scholarship.2

Donnermeyer’s Chapter 3 speaks to us on many levels, but one of his most important points is that rural sections of the US are not experiencing a drug epidemic, but rather substance use in these places has a long history. He provides evidence showing that “the story of drugs today is not about an epidemic, but about a concomitant progression of drugs abuse associated with economic, social, and cultural change.” His brief historical analysis begins with moonshine and then moves to marijuana, methamphetamine, oxycodone, heroin, and other highly addictive drugs. Where we are today with drugs in the rural US, as demonstrated by Donnermeyer, is a function of broader structural forces combined with high levels of unemployment, poverty, and other forms of inequality. These rural social problems are also briefly examined by me in Chapter 1.

This book talks a lot about justice, but what would a just justice system look like? Using case studies of decisions made in the name of justice in England and Wales during 2017–2018, in Chapter 6 Sandra Walklate examines what she coins “the challenges, pitfalls and possibilities for the delivery of justice in the 21st century.” It is a very theoretically sophisticated offering, which makes it difficult to summarize here. What especially stands out, however, is her critique of risk assessment, which, as she notes, is not a new feature of the criminal justice system. She shows us that risk assessment practices are becoming more sophisticated and complex, and are now endemic to the criminal justice system. This is highly troublesome, and Walklate contends that criminologists must challenge the “endemic embrace of risk” to generate meaningful and effective debates about what a just justice system should look like.

Walklate also briefly addresses the importance of engaging with “southern criminology,” a new critical criminological school of thought that draws heavily on the work of Australian scholar Raywen Connell (2007). Connell asserts that the theories and methods of the North American social sciences are generally seen as valid and applicable around the world. Southern criminologists like Carrington, Hogg, and Sozzo (2015), though, challenge criminology’s northern colonialism, which, as Walklate observes, contributed to the use of risk assessment practices for Indigenous peoples. Needless to say, these practices are culturally biased, and therefore contribute to the unequal administration of justice. More specifically, the implication for Indigenous people is that they may be overidentified as being at risk, and not surprisingly, most people who administer risk assessment tools to them are white. Documented by Tanya H. Lee (2016) in Indian Country Today, in the US, risk assessment instruments are definitely “turning Native kids into criminals” (p. 1).
In addition to summarizing all the chapters in this book, I have articulated some commonalities. But all the contributors have at least one thing in common, and that is they agree with this statement made a few years ago by Elliott Currie (2016):

> We need … to develop ways of fostering a criminology that is more than a relatively passive witness to the destruction wrought by contemporary global forces – much less an accomplice – and instead vigorously steps up to take on the job of combatting those forces and dedicating itself unapologetically to the reduction of needless pain, fear, and injustice around the world. That is the kind of criminology I want to be doing for as long as I’m capable of doing it. And the more people who join me, the happier I will be.

*(p. 29)*

**Why this book?**

The main objective of this project is to both join Elliott and to answer Winlow et al.’s (2015) call for rejuvenating the political left by providing probing answers and progressive initiatives aimed at successfully challenging the destructive impacts of “capitalism with the lid off” and other forms of inequality like patriarchy and racism (Currie, 2016, p. 10). All the contributors seek to develop the kind of analysis that can underpin both short- and long-term strategies for change in a time when this kind of visionary but pragmatic thinking is desperately needed.

A considerable amount of space is devoted to these three themes: the nature and dimensions of the deepening assault on progressive values and institutions in the current age; the roots of that stunning and largely unpredicted success of extreme right-wing parties and agendas in many countries around the world (especially in the US); and bold, creative strategies to challenge those agendas and restart the movement toward a sustaining and humane world order. Together with the other contributors, Elliott and I want to offer readers a book that illuminates the social, cultural, and economic forces that have taken us to this point, to sketch out the damage that the new regressive trends have already brought and threaten to accelerate in the future, and to outline steps toward a genuinely effective movement for a better and more just society. Developing a new progressive agenda is fundamentally necessary because “critical discourse divorced from critical practice degenerates into mere literary criticism, the value of which is a purely scholastic question” (Currie, DeKeseredy, & MacLean, 1990, p. 50). Maybe, if we eventually achieve this goal, watching or reading the news will again be a routine part of people’s daily lives.

In the age of Trump, we are also witnessing the rapid corporatization of institutions of higher learning and the influx of neoliberal university administrators.
Consequently, professors are being asked to do more with less, and this causes much stress. My colleagues frequently tell me that they would like to get more involved with broader political movements, but they don’t have the time and all their energy is eaten up by the growing number of classes they must teach and the administrative tasks they are required to perform, plus the number of publications and grant proposals they are mandated to churn out. Maybe, then, it might be a good idea to contemplate these words included in Simon Winlow’s (2018) obituary for Steve Redhead,3 whose book Trump Studies will be published later this year by Emerald: “[W]e should think about how much time we waste on pointless tasks foisted upon us by our employers, and those we willfully take up to the detriment of those who deserve our time and care” (p. 35).

We must always remember that the political agenda we are calling for is not only “about us.” It is for making the lives of our loved ones, our friends, and our community members healthier and happier. It is about carving out a better world for our grandchildren and the grandchildren of people who would like to see them live in what Currie (2013) coins a “sustaining society.” Winlow asks us to think about “how we will use the few years of our life still available to us.” To all my academic friends: let’s divert our energy away from the pointless tasks Winlow talks about, and use the years we have left to help achieve the dream advanced in this book.

Notes

1 This Introduction includes revised sections of work published previously by DeKeseredy (2000, 2011) and DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1996, 2018).
2 That South and Brisman (2013) put together the Routledge International Handbook of Green Criminology is a powerful statement on the development of the field. Since then, scores of scholarly works have been published, and we will definitely see even more coming out in the next few years.
3 Steve was a prolific author, and he specialized in these fields: cultural studies, social and cultural theory, law and popular culture, critical criminology, sport and media cultures, political economy, and physical cultural studies. I had the pleasure of working with him at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology from the fall of 2011 to the fall of 2012. Please go to www.steveredhead.zone/profile/ for more information on this highly influential scholar.

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