Review Essay Note

Interrogating Richard Leo's Claims about Police Scholarship

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In a recent issue of *Law & Society Review*, Richard Leo (1996) takes full advantage of the intellectual freedom given to review essayists in "Police Scholarship for the Future: Resisting the Pull of the Policy Audience." He claims that most of police scholarship of the 1990s is "impoverished theoretically" and "often not worth reading" (p. 865) and blames the current generation of police scholars for falling into the grip (and deep pockets) of the policy audience. He contrasts current scholarship with a golden age of police inquiry, the 1960s, in which theoretical breakthroughs were common, and scholars were driven by their critical instincts rather than by material interests. His review of current works is narrower than most published in the *Review*, covering only two monographs published in the 1990s, and holding out but one (Bayley 1994) as evidence of all that is wrong with contemporary, sociolegal inquiry of policing.

After a decade of pursuing another line of sociolegal inquiry, I have returned to police scholarship, drawn largely by the research agendas of a number of doctoral students in Justice Studies at Arizona State University. My connection with their work and with that of a number of the current generation of sociolegal scholars pursuing police scholarship around the country generates an impression quite at odds with Leo's view. Critical police scholarship is an emerging strand of sociolegal studies quite distinct and apart from the *continuous* pull of the policy audience on the great majority of American criminologists and criminal justice researchers. It is influenced by the empirical work of a senior group of criminological and sociolegal scholars who have long focused on the meaning of police work in organizational and community contexts, including Skolnick (1966), Manning

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(1977), Van Maanen (1978), Muir (1977), Bittner (1967), Westley (1970), and Black (1980). But it is also drawing significantly on European social theorists interested fundamentally in state formation, including Durkheim (1986), Weber (1954), and Foucault (1979, 1988), and sociolegal scholars in Europe engaged in targeted inquiries of the relationship between policing and crises of the state, including Hall et al. (1978) and Keith (1993).

The current generation of sociolegal scholars pursuing police studies are integrating these American and European traditions to generate a new body of critical inquiry, uncovering new insights about the meaning of policing (see Herbert 1996; Mulcahy 1995), pursuing issues of policing ignored in the 1960s (see Stalans & Finn 1995), and connecting police practices to processes of state formation and legitimacy (see Crank 1994). This latter focus includes critical scholarship about community policing (see Lyons 1997 forthcoming), an area of inquiry that Leo claims is fully under the grip of the policy audience. Ironically, a number of works identified with this new generation of critical policing studies are represented in recent issues of the *Review* and other sociolegal journals.

As for the pull of the policy audience, Leo offers no empirical evidence that the state has deeper pockets today, in comparison to the 1960s and the early 1970s, for enticing young scholars to its agenda. Instead, he lists a number of policy-driven funding sources that are fueling applied police scholarship while not mentioning that these same organizations (or their equivalents) have been engaged in these practices since the 1960s. But it's not how much applied money is out there that matters. What has changed since the 1960s has been the collapse of mainstream political opposition to law and order, and this in turn has moved the policy agenda of crime and justice, along with its applied research program, further to the right. These political events, coupled with the inability of proponents of critical criminology to capture the major graduate training programs and journals of their discipline, have resulted in the production of another generation of applied criminologists who have responded to the continuous pull of the policy audience.

In sharp contrast to these disciplinary realities, the proponents of the critical strands of sociolegal studies have radically transformed law and society inquiry since the 1960s. These scholars, the academic associations and graduate programs aligned with them, and the modest funding sources they influence have provided the intellectual space and fiscal stimuli for critical inquiry of crime and in/justice, including the strand of policing scholarship sketched above. What remains to be dealt with is the critical need to change American criminology as we know it. Richard Leo's message, with more careful attention to audience, could contribute to this project.

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