



The Criminal Brain: Understanding Biological Theories of Crime

By Nicole Rafter

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What is the relationship between criminality and biology? Nineteenth-century phrenologists insisted that criminality was innate, a trait inherent in the offender's brain matter. While they were eventually repudiated as pseudo-scientists and self-deluded charlatans, today the pendulum has swung back. Both criminologists and biologists have begun to speak of a tantalizing but disturbing possibility: that criminality may be inherited as a set of genetic deficits that place one at risk for theft, violence, and sexual deviance. If that is so, we may soon confront proposals for genetically modifying "at risk" fetuses or doctoring up criminals so their brains operate like those of law-abiding citizens. In **The Criminal Brain**, well-known criminologist Nicole Rafter traces the sometimes violent history of these criminological theories and provides an introduction to current biological theories of crime, or biocriminology, with predictions of how these theories are likely to develop in the future.

What do these new theories assert? Are they as dangerous as their forerunners, which the Nazis and other eugenicists used to sterilize, incarcerate, and even execute thousands of supposed "born" criminals? How can we prepare for a future in which leaders may propose crime-control programs based on biology? Enhanced with fascinating illustrations and written in lively prose, **The Criminal Brain** examines these issues in light of the history of ideas about the criminal brain. By tracing the birth and growth of enduring ideas in criminology, as well as by recognizing historical patterns in the interplay of politics and science, she offers ways to evaluate new theories of the criminal brain that may radically reshape ideas about the causes of criminal behavior.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Rafter impressively documents the genealogy of biological ideas in criminology. She shows that criminology must take new biological ideas seriously and contextualize sociologically both the ideas and the phenomena in which biologists engage. **The Criminal Brain** warrants thorough and broad discussion.”

Joachim J. Savelsberg co-author of *Constructing White-Collar Crime: Rationalities, Communication, Power*

About the Author

Nicole Rafter was Professor Emeritus of Criminology at Northeastern University. Her publications include *The Crime of All Crimes: Toward a Criminology of Genocide*, *The Criminal Brain: Understanding Biological Theories of Crime*, and, with Michelle Brown, *Criminology Goes to the Movies*. In 2009, Rafter was awarded the Sutherland Award by the American Society of Criminology for outstanding contributions to the discipline.

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