

## PART I: CRIME

1. For decades, many scholars have focused their attention on what makes particular individuals more likely to “offend” than other (similarly situated) individuals. Other scholars, however, have doggedly focused on a variety of structural factors associated with criminality (e.g., social inequality, racism, politics, etc.). Are these two approaches to understanding crime complimentary or contradictory to each other? Does the adoption of one necessitate the rejection of the other? Explain your position by relying on several theoretical perspectives and/or empirical studies to make your case.
2. In your opinion, which criminological theory on the reading list has “stood the test of time” and shows the most promise in terms of shaping our understanding of crime and criminal behaviour? Please justify your decision by discussing the development of the theoretical perspective, the empirical research it has generated, the contributions it has made to the field of criminology/sociology, the criticisms pointed against it, and how adequately it has responded to said criticisms.
3. In recent years we have seen the emergence of a “criminology of space/place” that does not aim to alter the inclinations or subjectivities of potential offenders. Instead, it aims to modify aspects related to the built environment in an effort to deter crime or make it less possible (or even impossible). Drawing on the literature, make an argument about whether this is a desirable or undesirable development. Your answer should consider both the promises and risks of this approach.
4. Two classic criminological theories—labelling theory and deterrence theory—make vastly different predictions about the role of sanctions. The former suggests that sanctions will generate further crime while the latter argues that sanctions will inhibit further crime. Discuss these theories, the evidence supporting their predictions, and which perspective you think provides the best theoretical framework for thinking about sanctions.
5. Focusing on the relationship between inequality and crime, discuss each of the following questions: (1) How does poverty shape crime and those who engage in criminal activity? (2) How does the urban setting, including the physical environment, shape crime and those who engage in it? (3) How do race, gender, and sexuality affect the experiences of women and girls who engage in criminal activities?
6. Criminologists have argued that theorizing on the causes of crime needs to move beyond treating gender as a variable and begin to fully account for the gender gap in crime. In this two-part essay, discuss: a) what we know about the gender gap in crime (patterns and trends), and; b) the extent to which existing theories of criminal behavior can explain the gender gap in crime.
7. Criminologists regularly study the behavior of individuals involved in crime, or who work in the criminal justice system. In doing so, they must often make a conscious decision about whether to treat their participants’ accounts as: a) accurate reflections of their behaviors and attitudes, or; b) social constructions, which may or may not be accurate but are still valuable

resource in their own right. Craft an essay addressing the challenges inherent in adopting either the “realist” or “constructionist” approach to this issue. Make an argument for how criminologists should best conceive of and address this ontological issue in practice.

8. Consider the range of theoretical perspectives that scholars have used in their attempt to understand crime as both an individual behaviour and social phenomenon (e.g., choice theory, social structure theory, social process theory, social conflict theory, etc.). Choose two perspectives that you feel represent the sharpest contrast, and provide reasons for your choice. Discuss each theory critically, addressing their assumptions, units of analysis, most important concepts/sub-theories and the methods they employ. What are the main points of convergence and dissimilarity?

## **PART II: PUNISHMENT, THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM, & THE LAW**

9. Punishment has been the centerpiece of America’s criminal justice policy for the last half-century. How effective has the focus on incarceration and social control been at reducing crime? What have we learned about the impact of incapacitation and deterrence on individuals, neighborhoods, and society? In light of the evidence, what recommendations do you have about justice policy going forward?
10. At least since Foucault’s writing, a group of criminologists have displayed considerable discomfort with what they perceive as criminology’s complicity in systems of discipline, control, and domination. Drawing on the literature, assess these critiques and provide an argument as to whether it is appropriate for criminologists to be involved in research designed to directly improve the efficiency and fairness of the criminal justice system and/or the treatment of criminally involved individuals/groups.
11. Scholars of punishment sometimes proceed as if a universal definition of “punishment” exists. Does such a definition exist? If so, what is it? If not, what are the various ways that scholars have come to understand and measure punishment? Incorporate your answers into the following essay prompt: What does it mean for society to be “more” punitive, and are more punitive societies necessarily less just?
12. Several criminological theories identify a new mode of governing crime often referred to as the turn to a “new penology.” How, if at all, has the new penology reshaped our understanding of the field? What are the strengths and limitations of this approach, and what are the implications for researchers, practitioners, and criminalized individuals and groups?
13. What does it mean when scholars argue that the modern criminal justice system is “systemically” racist? Why is history important for understanding systemic racism in our criminal justice institutions? How does systemic racism manifest in various facets of the criminal justice system, including policing, criminal courts/sentencing, and prisons?
14. Several criminological traditions, including critical theory, have been criticized for operating without an understanding of colonialism. Why is it important to consider colonialism when analysing the impact of the criminal justice system on Indigenous peoples? Moreover, why is

it important for criminologists to understand colonialism as *ongoing* rather than a thing of the past? Select two theories of punishment that would benefit from engagement with these questions, and describe how such considerations might subsequently improve the theories and our understanding of Indigenous offending and criminal justice involvement.

15. Some scholars argue that the sociology of law is an interdisciplinary field without a theoretical core. In your opinion, is the sociology of law a coherent area of social science research? What are some common themes, theories, or orientations that tie this area together? Discuss points of convergence and separation. Use empirical research on one or more topics in the sociology of law to illustrate your points.
16. Drawing from literature on the sociology of law, how would you characterize the relationship between norms and laws? What consequences (social, political, legal) follow from this distinction and what are the implications for society's most vulnerable populations?