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Challenges for the Next Century

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Behind the Veil of Secrecy

Understanding Child Molesters: Taking Charge. By Eric Leberg. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997. 264 pp.

The last several years have seen an explosion of books about child molesters and sex offenders in general. Most of these books are written by treatment professionals, academic researchers, surviving victims of abuse, or criminal investigators. While all of these works might mention how the probation/parole system is involved with the child molester, that mention is usually cursory and passing. Most agree that the probation officer plays an integral role in managing the child molester, but few delineate the methods and strategies available to probation/parole staff. Eric Leberg's *Understanding Child Molesters: Taking Charge* is therefore a welcome addition to the child molestation literature.

Leberg's basic thesis is that the child molester lives and operates behind veils of secrecy and will exert enormous effort to maintain his hidden, secret life from his family, therapist, probation officers, and others. Leberg writes, "What the convicted child molester wants most is that everyone accepts him back into society with no awareness, knowledge, or discussion of his crime or crimes."

Leberg argues that the only way for the child molester to be safely reintegrated into society is for the pattern of secrecy to be broken, and the person whom he suggests has the main responsibility for doing this, by authority and role, is the probation officer. Sex offenders develop and maintain their pattern of secrecy by using several defense mechanisms, particularly blaming, denial, and manipulation. Leberg details use of each of these defense mechanisms through vignettes, and they are instructive and illuminating.

As a probation officer, Leberg clearly is familiar with the court system and follows a child molester case through the entire court process. He focuses on the presentence investigation process as the critical time to gain information about the molester's sexual proclivities and patterns of sexual abuse. The presentence writer has the opportunity to confront the molester's denial and manipulation by pointing out discrepancies between the molester's version of the offense and the official version. Very specific conditions of supervision, treatment recommendations, and incarceration options also are responsibilities of the presentence writer. By addressing these issues, the presentence writer acts as the vanguard for breaking the pattern of secrecy and prepares the molester for full disclosure that is crucial for relapse prevention.

There are four principles that Leberg maintains are necessary for anybody dealing with sex offenders, be they relatives, treatment providers, or corrections officials. These are: being clear in communication; clarifying roles and expectations; maintaining self-discipline and vigilance, and being confrontative. Those of us who have dealt with sex offenders are all too familiar with their sophist responses to simple questions. For instance, an "official residence" may be the address the molester has on his driver's license, not the place he lives. Nonetheless, he still may proclaim that it is "official" according to the Illinois Secretary of State. By clarifying exactly what the molester means by residence, the probation officer can avoid such attempts at deception.

One weakness in this book is that Leberg fails to differentiate the many types of child molesters. He does indicate that "each child molester is unique" and "requires an individualized plan," but it would have been helpful if he had suggested different supervision strategies as predicated by type of child molester. For instance, a probation officer likely would approach a predatory pedophile differently from a one-time incest offender. Indeed, one senses that most of the cases referred to in the book are incest cases, and these do present a different clinical picture and require different strategies and treatment than do pedophiles. Nonetheless, *Understanding Child Molesters: Taking Charge* is a welcome contribution to the field and useful to any probation officer dealing with this very challenging population.

Chicago, Illinois

TERRY D. CHILDERS

Challenges for the Next Century

Crime and Punishment in America. By Elliott Currie. New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998. 230 pp. \$23.

In his new book, *Crime and Punishment in America*, Elliott Currie examines a simple but important question: How has America's experiment with punishment worked? He bases this question on the idea that America, distinct from other developed countries, relies largely on the penal system and the threat of punishment to solve the problem of social control. His answer to this question is both compelling and thought provoking.

The key to Currie's answer comes with relaying some obvious facts about punishment in America and dispelling some myths. The fact is that America has the developed world's worst level of violence. There are a number of myths Currie deals with in the book, but central to his argument is the myth that we have that

level of violence because we are too lenient on offenders. In a well-developed series of arguments, Currie dispels this myth by demonstrating two facts about the possibility of punishment and its severity. He shows that the chance for incarceration for violent offenses has increased sharply in the last few years and that average time served is comparable to, if not more than, that of other developed countries.

Currie's analysis of America's experiment with prison demonstrates that our reliance on punishment has failed to solve our problems. He then turns to the question of what can be done. Here again Currie is faced with the task of dispelling some strongly held myths, this time about the solution—prevention and rehabilitation. Currie argues that there are two myths about prevention and rehabilitation. These myths are, first, that we have tried both prevention and rehabilitation and, second, that “nothing works.” Currie argues convincingly that while there is no “silver bullet” among prevention or rehabilitation programs, we do know more about these than ever before. For example, he argues that we do know that children who are abused are at risk for becoming delinquent. His review of some currently existing programs for dealing with child abuse shows that there are programs that work. They involve comprehensive treatment strategies that are long term and deal with the problem in the larger context of the family.

In a book that takes on the difficult task of dispelling some strongly held beliefs about crime and punishment, Currie probably faces his hardest task in convincing Americans that part of the solution to the problem of crime is a better developed welfare state. His argument is that social and economic exclusion fosters crime through the effect it has on child development, abuse of children, and the ability of parents to supervise and discipline children. Even for those resistant to any policy that involves “welfare,” his suggested reforms are compelling for they center on work. To give one example, Currie argues that we need reforms that ensure that people who work make a decent living that allows them enough time to raise children and participate in community life.

What becomes clear in reading this book is a simple but important point. America has relied for too long on prisons and punishment to control crime. Though prisons play an important role in the punishment of crime, punishment cannot take the place of prevention, and prevention requires strong families and communities. Building families and communities that can prevent crime takes a long-term commitment that needs to be made now.

There is one final point that needs to be made about this book. Currie ends *Crime and Punishment in America* with this thought: “In a civilized society what matters is not just *whether* we reduce crime, but *how*.” The

same is true of our debate about the solution to America's crime problem. It is important to have that debate, but the shape that debate takes is critical. It is too important an issue to be driven by loaded phrases designed merely to inflame the public and capture media attention, by anecdotal material disguised as data, or by half truths. Of all those writing about the solution to America's crime problem today, it is Elliott Currie who gives the reader a discussion that compels the reader to thought and respects the reader's intelligence.

Huntsville, Texas

RUTH TRIPLETT

Insights into a New, Proactive Criminal Justice System

Emerging Criminal Justice: Three Pillars for a Proactive Justice System. By Paul H. Hahn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998. 219 pp.

The traditional criminal justice system is reactive, according to the author. The manifestations of a reactive system include ineffective strategies, such as wars on crime and drugs, which amount to “swatting at mosquitoes while ignoring the swamp” and over-reliance on secure incarceration. The latter has led to prison building becoming “our greatest growth industry.” On the horizon the author sees a movement toward proactive approaches that rely on community participation. The three pillars of this proactive criminal justice system are: community policing, community corrections, and restorative justice. Replacing the traditional, reactive criminal justice system with this new proactive version requires “major surgery,” in fact, “a whole new paradigm for understanding the system and most of its elements,” according to the author. He cautions, however, that this new paradigm should not be construed as equating with being “soft on crime.”

The book is organized into two parts. The first part addresses the need for a proactive criminal justice system and the second describes each of the three essential elements of a proactive criminal justice system. The two chapters of the first part deal with the bankruptcy of the traditional “get tough” reactive policies in both the adult and juvenile justice systems and offer a new way, a proactive way, to examine the causes of and solutions to crime. The “get tough” policies, such as the “three-strikes-and-you're-out” laws that emphasize “locking ‘em up” and ignore prevention measures have incurred certain costs without concomitant positive results, according to the author. There are costs associated with the construction as well as operation and maintenance of new facilities. Despite the growth in prison and jail beds, crowding is rampant. The United States stands apart from most of the world in the number of incarcerated persons, yet, an American Bar Association study that the author cites shows that “during