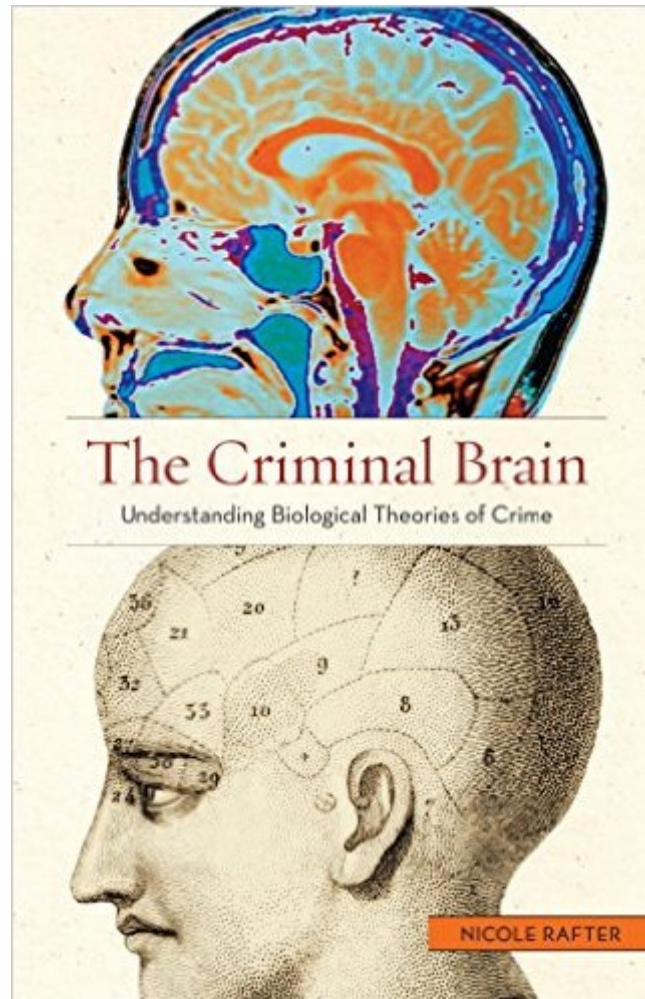


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The Criminal Brain: Understanding Biological Theories Of Crime



Synopsis

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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Customer Reviews

This is the definitive work on biological theory of crime. Finally, someone who embraces the past however strange to some now. Further, A WHOLE chapter called "criminology's darkest hour". This is about the Nazi party and is so important. This subject is one that we have not studied in depth in the world of criminology. Rafter also gives the reader a great feel for where criminology is going and why it is so very important to prevent another "dark hour" in criminology! Recommend this to all in the field of criminal justice (especially undergrad and graduate students)!

Excellent base to understand the history of criminal theories, together with the cultural history in which these theories were embedded.

I was really excited to read this book, but ended up fairly disappointed. While Rafter is extremely intelligent, it is obvious that she has never done research in the hard sciences. She does a fair job talking about biological research as a lay-person, but doesn't truly understand it. For example, in her discussion of twin studies, she states, "...monozygotic (MZ) twins, who have identical genes and thus (at least in theory) hold the 'nurture' variable constant." Try again, Rafter. Monozygotic twins don't control for environmental influences. Additionally, she editorializes her history of biocriminology. This wouldn't be so bad if she presented that intention from the beginning. Unfortunately, she presents herself as detailing the history of biocriminology, not coloring that history with her opinions about its research. She is absolutely right that scientists made mistakes and allowed racism and fear to inform their work, but scientific mistakes were not always paired with racism and fear. Science is only as good as what we know right now. We didn't always know a lot so bad things happened. Hindsight is a privilege that she fails to acknowledge. Her opinion is that all science is perverted by its social context, no matter how hard that perversion is to see at first. I would like to take her to a pathology lab, sit her in front of some slides, and have her explain how the social context influences the identification of a disease, for example. I gave her a 2/5 stars because I did learn a lot of history. I think this book is great if you can separate her opinion from the historical facts. She also ends with a very positive message overall. Instead of warning readers about scientists, or specific disciplines, she warns readers of the potential tragedies that could take place if manipulative politicians and/or ignorant people misrepresent research. She also encourages future inter-disciplinary collaboration.

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