

No. 336 January 2010

A Crime Theory Demolished

Heather MacDonald

18 January 2010

The recession of 2008-09 has undercut one of the most destructive social theories that came out of the 1960s: the idea that the root cause of crime lies in income inequality and social injustice. As the economy started shedding jobs in 2008, criminologists and pundits predicted that crime would shoot up, since poverty, as the "root causes" theory holds, begets criminals. Instead, the opposite happened. Over seven million lost jobs later, crime has plummeted to its lowest level since the early 1960s. The consequences of this drop for how we think about social order are significant.

The notion that crime is an understandable reaction to poverty and racism took hold in the early 1960s. Sociologists Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin argued that juvenile delinquency was essentially a form of social criticism. Poor minority youth come to understand that the American promise of upward mobility is a sham, after a bigoted society denies them the opportunity to advance. These disillusioned teens then turn to crime out of thwarted expectations.

[Click here to read article.](#)

This article was published by [The Wall Street Journal](#) online on 4 January 2010.

Articles in the *Perspectives* series plus a large library of books, studies, speeches, articles and DVDs on a wide range of public policy issues can be found at www.nzbr.org.nz

Related studies and commentary:

Controlling Crime in New Zealand

A report published by the New Zealand Business Roundtable

May 1996

By Cathy Buchanan and Peter R Hartley

[\[Full Text\]](#)

If you have received this email from a friend or colleague and wish to subscribe, [please click here](#).
If you wish to unsubscribe from the Roundtable mailing list, [please click here](#).