



The Evil of Crime

In promoting the nation-building enterprises upon which President George W. Bush embarked the U.S. military, the most visible and loudest voices of the conventional right are forever reminding the rest of us of the need for interminable war against the dreaded “Islamo-Fascist.” Anyone who doesn’t endorse the neoconservative vision of “the War on Terror,” or anyone, like President Obama, who doesn’t prosecute it with the neoconservative’s zeal, is deemed weak. As neoconservative radio and television personality Sean Hannity typically says of his political opponents, they simply do not grasp “the nature of evil in our time.”



Let us note, firstly, that inasmuch as the Islamic terrorist deliberately targets for death innocent human beings — not just men, but women and children — the neoconservative is correct that such a creature is indeed evil. Yet few people in the non-Islamic world, and doubtless not even all Muslims, fail to recognize this at least at some level of consciousness. And yes, the neoconservative is further correct that Islamic terrorism poses a threat to our way of life against which we must remain forever vigilant.

Ironically, though, because of his singular focus on — some would say obsession with — Islamic terrorism, and his relative silence with respect to the crime with which America is plagued, it is actually the neoconservative who fails to reckon with “the nature of evil in our time.” This is no exaggeration, for America’s criminals pose a far greater threat to her than do Islamic terrorists.

There are a couple of reasons for this verdict.

First, a modern state is a *legal* association. The members of a state — its associates — are *citizens* related to one another through the *laws* that constitute the association. This, I believe, is what Americans mean when they describe their beloved country as “a nation of laws, not of men,” or when they say that “no one is above the law.”

Since, then, as citizens we are held together by law, every instance of *outlawry*, every *crime*, is an assault against our association. And because the Criminal is as much an associate as the rest of us, he imperils his fellow citizens to an extent the likes of which the Islamic terrorist can only dream.

The second argument for my thesis is really a variant of the first. Another respect in which criminals undercut the thread — the law — that makes us citizens and binds us together pertains to *the power* that they assume over their prey.

The early modern philosopher [Thomas Hobbes](#) contrasted civil society — life under government — with what he called “the state of nature,” a pre-political condition from which government was absent. In Hobbes’ vision, life in the state of nature is most unpleasant, a “war of all against all,” for in a state of nature there is no “common power” (authority) to which all individuals are bound, no *law* to which they can appeal in adjudicating their conflicts. And because there is no settled law, there are no obligations:



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each individual has an *absolute* right to appropriate whatever means he deems fit for the sake of preserving his always precarious existence.

It is precisely because of life's wretchedness in a state of nature that individuals agree to abandon it by creating government, an office of rule whose jurisdiction extends over all who consent to exchange their unconditional right to self-preservation for the peace that government's establishment and enforcement of law promises to secure.

Now, there is much to quarrel with in Hobbes' classic statement of the rise and justification of government, but it is not without more than its share of insights. The idea on which we should focus here is the idea that as long as individuals refuse to submit to one and the same system of law, as long as they remain determined to seek their own advancement regardless of the costs it imposes on others, they in effect repudiate the civil condition and, thus, reignite the war of all against all that characterized the state of nature.

This is what the Criminal has done. In throwing all constraints to the wind, he becomes the predator to the law-abiding citizen's prey.

Indeed, this isn't just a point of abstract theory. The Criminal has been exploiting and intimidating the law abiding for as long as he has existed. But when he joins himself to those who think as he does — when he becomes a *mobster* or a *gangster* — it is then that his power over others becomes truly invidious. To the old familiar objection that mobsters, especially Mafiosi, only bother one another, two replies are in the coming.

First, insofar as it those victims specifically targeted for attack of whom we are concerned, this statement is *generally* — but *only* generally — true. For example, former head of the Gambino crime family, [John Gotti](#), had a neighbor who accidentally killed Gotti's twelve year-old son with his car. The ever merciful Gotti had [the poor man murdered](#).

Second, momentarily putting to one side the main point of my argument — which is that every law-abiding member of our legal association is the Criminal's victim — we can turn to the bulk of the residents of the Criminal's stomping grounds to see the immense power that he is able to wield over them. After all, how many law abiding blacks and Hispanics in the 'hoods and barrios of America have shown the will to cooperate with law enforcement officers in bringing the [Bloods](#), [the Crips](#), [the Latin Kings](#), and other gang members to justice? And the fear that black and brown criminals have inspired in the law-abiding members of their communities white criminals have been inspiring in the law-abiding members of theirs, whether it is in America's "Little Italy's" or elsewhere.

Neoconservative Republicans have been critical of "moderate Muslims" for their alleged failure to speak out against the evil of the Islamic terrorist. Yet neither the neoconservatives nor, for all of that, most of us been outspoken when it comes to combating the evil of the Criminal right here at home.

In this article, I hoped to show why our domestic crime is the greatest evil with which we have to contend. In the next, I hope to show how each of us may do our best to combat it.





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