

**R.C. Kramer and R. White, *Carbon Criminals, Climate Crimes: Critical Issues in Crime and Society*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2020, 242pp, £24.95 (paperback).**

**Reviewed by Lea Sitkin**

*Carbon Criminals, Climate Crimes* is the latest book from Ron Kramer, an American criminologist already widely known among his peers for his seminal work on state and corporate crime. The book offers an “analysis of climate change from a criminological perspective,” drawing on a wide range of academic and activist literature to present its case. Climate change is rarely considered within traditional criminological curricula, mainly because it is rarely subject to criminal law. However, in the author’s view, climate change should be considered within the scope of criminological enquiry. Here, Kramer draws on the critical argument that “by choosing [oneself to use] the legal definition of crime, criminologists tacitly agree to use the moral value of interests (usually of dominant political and economic groups) that are encoded in state criminal law” (15). Instead, Kramer argues, it is the duty of the criminologist to bring unrecognized but morally blameworthy harms to the attention of social audiences, and there is no better example of this than climate change.

Drawing on his previous work with Ray Michalowski, Kramer goes on to argue that climate change should be understood as a “state-corporate” crime, resulting primarily from the mutually reinforcing interactions of political and economic institutions. These dynamics are illustrated through a detailed empirical case study of the politics of climate change in the United States of America (USA), through which four forms of state-corporate climate crime are identified. These are: (1) crimes of continued extraction and rising emissions; (2) crimes of political omission; (3) crimes of social organized climate change denial; and (4) climate crimes of empire, including military action to protect access to fossil fuels. The details are damning. Despite knowing for decades about the risks of climate change, oil, carbon and gas companies have continued to extract fossil fuels through increasingly damaging means. Citing Bill McKibben’s article on “global warming’s terrifying new maths,” the author relays that the amount of carbon already contained in the proven coal, oil and gas reserves is *five* times higher than the amount scientists have said we can safely burn to keep to less than 2 degrees warming. These companies have also become “merchants of doubt” (Oreskes and Conway 2010), spreading misinformation and undermining climate change campaigns. The five largest publicly traded oil and gas companies (ExxonMobil, Shell, Chevron, BP and Total) have invested \$1 billion of shareholder funds to block climate change policies since the Paris Agreement was signed.

The case study also discusses the actions and inactions of successive US governments vis-à-vis climate change and the extraction of oil. Clearly, different

administrations held different opinions about climate change and, in turn, hold different levels of culpability for climate crimes. Trump's villainy will come as a surprise to no one, although the details—the successive and egregious assaults on domestic and international environmental law, and the efforts made to silence scientists—retain their power to shock. However, the book chronicles culpability across party lines: both Republican and Democratic administrations have engaged in military action to protect US access to petroleum and natural gas and both have prioritized immediate economic gain over environmental protection. The problem, the book argues, is structural. So long as capitalism is unfettered and militarism remains the driving ideology, climate crimes will continue.

Kramer's formidable academic background meant he was perfectly placed to write this book and his depth of knowledge is reflected in the book's rich conceptual and theoretical analysis. Drawing on a wide range of academic and activist literature, *Carbon Criminals, Climate Crimes* will be useful both to researchers and teachers seeking to develop a critical awareness in their students (a tip: the first chapter offers a brilliantly clear discussion of the development of critical concepts of crime over time). This book also works well as a fine-grained empirical study of American politics, with one caveat: the omission of a sustained analysis of environmental inequalities—particularly, environmental racism—within the USA. As is well established in the literature, people of colour and/or of low socio-economic status in the USA are exposed to much higher levels of air pollution than the overall population; they are also more vulnerable to the effects of climate change such as increased hurricanes, wildfires and flooding. And, as the dispatch of National Guard troopers with permission to use lethal force during Hurricane Katrina demonstrates, people of colour are also affected by the US government's policy of militaristic adaptation to climate disruption. A failure to discuss these trends means that the question of how race fits into the political economy of climate crimes is unanswered.

Notwithstanding this omission, the book is an important contribution to the literature and to the fight for climate justice more generally. Its relevance can hardly be overstated. As this review was being written, much of North America was under a heat-dome, with temperatures soaring beyond climate scientist's worst predictions and wildfires raging through mountain towns. Water is running out, hundreds of people have died of heat-related illnesses and doctors are warning people to stay indoors. It is easy to lose faith in the face of what is already unfolding, but the book makes the case for hope. There is much we can still do. And for criminologists, the book encourages us to bring climate change to the centre of criminological curriculum. *Carbon Criminals, Climate Crimes* will be on my students' reading list this year.

*University of Westminster.*

## References

- Mckibben, B. (2012) “Global Warming’s Terrifying New Math”, *Rolling Stone*, 19 July. Available online at: <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/global-warmings-terrifying-new-math-188550/?print=true> (accessed 23 August 2021).
- Oreskes, N. and Conway, E.M. (2010) *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*. London: Bloomsbury.