

COLIN WEBSTER

R I C H

C R I M E

P O O R

C R I M E

INEQUALITY AND THE RULE OF LAW

RICH CRIME, POOR CRIME

## Praise for *Rich Crime, Poor Crime*

“This is an extraordinarily important book on how inequality shapes, and is shaped by, the law and criminal justice system. A must-read for everyone concerned with social justice.”

Kate E. Pickett,  
*Professor of Epidemiology, University of York, UK*

“Colin Webster is to be congratulated for producing such an insightful book at a time when a discussion of the relationships between inequality and crime is needed more than ever. Drawing on a range of existing studies, Webster takes us on a journey from early modern England to the present day, illuminating how contemporary British society is founded on a legacy of past exploitation by elites against the populous. In examining the conditions of extreme inequality that give rise to both crimes committed by the poor and crimes committed by the rich, Webster provides us with the text 1973’s *The New Criminology* suggested was needed.”

Stephen Farrall,  
*Professor of Criminology, University of Nottingham, UK*

“In this brilliant book, Colin Webster shows that today’s billionaire kleptocrats and oligarchs are, in reality, the capitalist ‘children’ of their robber forebears. With a critical eye firmly on the violent and plundering historical role of states, companies and the upper classes Webster provides a passionate, detailed and sweeping review of the myriad abuses of humanity that became enshrined in elite-state formations and law, alongside the power they came to wield with colonial expansion. As the winners of the economic system strode and plundered the globe’s resources, new forms and extremes of damage to populations were unleashed, sanctified in law. A work of scholarship, insight and relevant example, *Rich Crime, Poor Crime* reinvigorates debate about the complex roots of harm in the societies and economies we all inhabit. This is a history of harm absolutely for our time today.”

Rowland Atkinson,  
*Chair in Inclusive Societies, University of Sheffield, UK*

# RICH CRIME, POOR CRIME

## Inequality and the Rule of Law

By

**Colin Webster**

*Leeds Beckett University, UK*



United Kingdom – North America – Japan  
India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited  
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2023

Copyright © 2023 Colin Webster.  
Published under exclusive licence by Emerald Publishing Limited.

**Reprints and permissions service**  
Contact: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. Any opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the authors. Whilst Emerald makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of its content, Emerald makes no representation implied or otherwise, as to the chapters' suitability and application and disclaims any warranties, express or implied, to their use.

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83909-825-3 (Print)  
ISBN: 978-1-83909-822-2 (Online)  
ISBN: 978-1-83909-824-6 (Epub)



ISOQAR certified  
Management System,  
awarded to Emerald  
for adherence to  
Environmental  
standard  
ISO 14001:2004.

Certificate Number 1985  
ISO 14001



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

I thank my wife Carol Douglas for her patience.



# CONTENTS

Introduction: Crime, Inequality and the Rule of Law	1
---	---

## PART I TAKING THE LONG VIEW

1. Capitalism and Crime in Early Modern England	11
2. Accumulation by Dispossession: Land Grabs, Enclosure and Trespass	35
3. Property, Poverty and the Rule of Law	61
4. State Crime: War and Plunder, Slavery, Empire and Famine	85

## PART II RICH AND POOR CRIME IN MODERN BRITAIN

5. Rich and Poor Britain	111
6. Offshoring: Corporate, Financial and Tax Crime	137
7. Capturing the State: Corruption, Outsourcing, Privatisation and Austerity	163
8. Poor Crime: Economic, Welfare and Policy Cycles	187

## PART III CONNECTING RICH AND POOR CRIME

9. Coding Capital: Protecting the Rich and Punishing the Poor	207
---	-----



10. Conclusion: 'There's One Law for the Rich and Another for the Poor'	217
References	223
Index	239