

## #08 (JOHN ECK)

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### Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm Jerry Ratcliffe with The Reducing Crime, a podcast featuring interviews with influential thinkers in the police service and leading crime and policing researchers working to advance public safety.

### Jerry Ratcliffe:

John Eck is a professor at the University of Cincinnati and the originator of the SARA model of problem oriented policing. We cover investigative priorities, the value of detective work for crime prevention and place based crime. We solve it all. Find out more at [reducingcrime.com](http://reducingcrime.com) and on Twitter @\_reducingcrime.

### Jerry Ratcliffe:

John Eck's an old friend who's been around policing for a long time. He's now a professor of criminal justice at the University of Cincinnati and received his PhD in criminology from the University of Maryland in 1994. But from 1977 to 95, John directed research for the police executive research forum, the police chief membership and research organization, where he did groundbreaking work in criminal investigation management problem oriented policing and drug control strategies. John's written numerous papers, books and monographs for police practitioners as well as for academic researchers. And he's the recipient of the 2016 Ronald Clark Ecker award, the Ronnie, for fundamental contributions to environmental criminology and crime analysis. He's internationally known as the intellect behind the SARA model of problem to policing. John also hangs around cemeteries and dabbles in granite sculpting, and make of that what you will. In this podcast, John explains the real value of investigators. What cemeteries can tell us about crime prevention or why community policing is a crime prevention failure.

### John Eck:

One of the interesting things about being in the Midwest is you really are in a backwater. You get off the coasts and media is very scarce and not all that good.

### Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

# REDUCING CRIME PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

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**John Eck:**

So, Philadelphia, New York, Washington, LA, you get a lot of people who have interesting things they want to hear about, they ask questions.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And then you moved to Cincinnati.

**John Eck:**

You've got The Cincinnati Enquirer, which basically is a disappearing newspaper-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

On the [inaudible 00:02:19]?

**John Eck:**

Yeah. Even public radio is not that good.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So where did you start?

**John Eck:**

Well, how far back do you want to go?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, I mean, you've been involved in policing since, I mean the basic question is Robert Peel. What was he like?

**John Eck:**

I got started as an undergraduate. I was interested one year in both criminal justice stuff vaguely and in international security affairs. And so I was taking classes in both and at the end of the term, I came to the conclusion that international security affairs was extremely interesting, but there were an incredible number of smart people in it. And I'd have to work extremely hard. And in criminal justice-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Competition, right?

**John Eck:**

Criminal justice, there were very few smart people and I wouldn't have to work as hard. I didn't really get into policing until I think I'd gone into a Master's program at the University of Michigan, but they had a internship requirement

between the first and second year. So I was assigned to guy named Hank Ruth, who was actually over at the Urban Institute. So I spent the time at the Urban Institute.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And then you worked at the Police Foundation after that?

**John Eck:**

After that, I was looking for a job obviously. And so was my wife, who I'd met in graduate school. And Hank introduced me to the people at the Police Foundation and they were starting up at that point, the police executive research forum. So I was the first researcher they hired.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

The stuff you're known for is the work around problem oriented policing, but you also did work on triage of investigations, which I think has been really fascinating.

**John Eck:**

It was three projects I was initially thrown at when I first started in '77. One was thing. They called crime classification. The idea was to come up with something better than uniform crime reports.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Is there anything worse?

**John Eck:**

I did a little bit of work in that and that got shunted off and eventually became Neibors.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Good grief though. How long has that taken them?

**John Eck:**

Yeah, forever. Forever. I'm glad I never stuck with that because it would have been boring as hell. The other thing had to do with some kind of gun projects, which as far as I know, never went anywhere. But the third thing was burglary investigations. Peoria Police Department had tested the Stanford Research Institute's, burglary screening tool. So it was trying to predict whether burglaries would be solved if handed to a detective. There was a young detective in Peoria who had been given this assignment and she pulled the cases out of their files and was able to show that it would work in Peoria. And so when the chief in Peoria reported this to our membership, it was quite a bit of interest by members of PERF at the time. And they said, "Well, we need to replicate this." So I flew out to Peoria as my first travel ever.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Peoria, which is in?

**John Eck:**

Illinois.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Steady sensation seekers, there's travel for you.

**John Eck:**

Yeah, exactly. My first two travel, one was a Peoria-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

International jet setter.

**John Eck:**

Yeah, Peoria, Illinois and Birmingham, Alabama were my first two [inaudible 00:05:23].

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That's the problem with solving crime, isn't it? We always go to the best places.

**John Eck:**

Yeah. It's like, oh yeah, I want to travel for the rest of my life because I get to go to these great places.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I always knew when I was doing my geography degree, I should have really studied tropical beaches.

**John Eck:**

There's a book called Alone Together, a guy named Edgerton or something wrote it. And I have a feeling that what he did was he said, "Oh, what do I want to do this summer? I want to hang out on the beach." And he got a grant. So he and his graduate students hung out on the beach and he writes this book on social control. But basically what are you doing? You're just sitting on a beach.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, the Australians, I think Ross Hommel and Mike Thompson, those guys have all done grants where they've been hanging out in bars, looking at-

**John Eck:**

Yeah.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That's the kind of project we should spend more time on. Why am I standing on street corners with cops looking at drug markets? We were just talking a moment ago about your early work on investigation because I think it's really fascinating because if I remember correctly, that you found that there were a bunch of cases that will be solved no matter what.

**John Eck:**

Right.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

There are a bunch of cases that would never be solved, however much effort, but there are this group in the middle that with enough of additional investigative effort could be solved. Now that was in the 80's wasn't it?

**John Eck:**

So the first study was this prediction thing and we got about 26 police agencies around the country to actually replicate the Peoria study. Then that led to a grant from the National Institute of Justice to do a follow onto the RAND study. RAND study had basically said, detective work is useless and it turned out to also be one of the worst studies ever conducted in history of criminal justice.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Are you a reviewer too?

**John Eck:**

When I first read it, I didn't know what I was doing. So I looked at it and I thought this is great. But then later on I started thinking, okay, well, do they have a control group? Do they have a comparison group? And I realized that they had none of the things that you'd want in science. So most of the findings about detectives not solving anything and not doing anything particularly special, was drawn from a sample of solved cases. So they weren't comparing to solved to unsolved. They just had the solved case.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You were doing that work in the 80s. How is it that our understanding of investigative effort and investigations has hardly changed or improved since then?

**John Eck:**

That's a great question. And the only answer I have, and I won't say this is definitive, is that by the time I get done with my study, everyone was bored with the topic. So that would be about '84-ish and crack cocaine started coming in. And

up until that point, people were really focused on things like burglary. When crack cocaine came in, violence spiked. And so people got very anxious about that and started focusing on that. At the same time, there was all this stuff about community policing. So it shifted the emphasis from the investigator side to the patrol side. I think also politically back in the 60s and 70s, there was a much greater competition between investigators and patrol in the senior management staff. And part of what this research was really about, I didn't realize that at the time, was a political ploy with the patrol based leadership trying to gain control over the investigative section, put them in their place.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It really was the case. You had to have an investigative background to become a police chief or to become senior. And that's now pretty much gone out the window.

**John Eck:**

Exactly, right. So if you want to advance to any police agency, for the most part, going into investigations is a backwater.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

The only thing worst is probably going into intelligence.

**John Eck:**

Yeah. Or anything that's not patrol. So it was a combination of things; internal politics, research, and just the way the crime trends were going. So by the time you get to the end of the 80s, you start getting into the beginnings of hotspots, patrolling, and community policing, that type of thing, and taking it into the patrol area.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Do you see that turning around at all? I'm starting to see people are getting really quite concerned about homicide clearance rates and shooting clearance rates, as you know, violence that's been decreasing for the last 20, 30 years is now leveling off and possibly increasing a little, it's not declining in such a predictable manner as it has for the last 20 years.

**John Eck:**

It's a slight decline. It's hard to tell from year to year, but the clearance rates for homicides from 1960 to 2017 or so, it's just a steady decline across the board. And it's mirrored in decline in robbery, burglary, larceny, aggravated assault, everything else.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

What do you ascribe that to?

**John Eck:**

One possibility is that the clearance rates were inflated back then and we actually have a much better, more rigorous definition now that's being applied. I think some of that's going on, but I don't think it accounts for all of it. I think that nature of homicides have changed. It's gone from mostly domestic related to gang and other kinds of things, which are harder to solve. Those are the two big things I can think of. What's interesting is during that entire time period, there's been a huge investment in technology for investigations, which clearly has had little payoff.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah. DNA was going to be the saving grace of the criminal justice system. And it's almost negligible role in investigations.

**John Eck:**

DNA, computers, automatic fingerprint systems, CCTV. You'd think that all of that stuff singly or in combination would have made a big deal of things. No, it doesn't seem to make a dent in it. Now, many things have been worse without it, but you can't claim that it's actually turned things around. So you asked about my thoughts about this return to investigation. So think about that as a background. So it's hard to say investigations have a strong return into making us safer. They probably are not deterring that many people, the incapacitation effects are probably small.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But the sense of justice?

**John Eck:**

Well, that I think is something we need to pay far more attention to than public safety. That investigations are probably best thought of is a justice phenomenon, not a crime control phenomenon. I need to be careful here because it's a distinction between the absolute amount of investigations versus the marginal. So it's a small change in investigative impact numbers of detectives technology. Those types of things are not going to make much difference. If you got rid of investigations altogether, then you would have a huge public safety problem, but you're not going to get much more out of investigations than we already got, for crime control.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That's an interesting question because I don't think we have any idea of what makes a good detective and I don't think we even know really what good detectives do.

**John Eck:**

No, I don't think we do.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But they may only be marginal gains, but we might be able to extract a little bit more return on that investment if we just understood a little bit more about the characteristics of effective detectives with high clearance rates and what

do they do? Because at the moment, it's just all on experience or people who have got a good feel for it, as David Simon wrote in the way of natural police.

**John Eck:**

Yeah. But how different is that than academic work really? Do we know really what makes a really good researcher?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

We do have some metrics though. They're fairly flawed, H indexes and stuff like that. They don't give you an indication of anybody's real impact on the field.

**John Eck:**

Right. Or why this person is publishing more things that people read than some other person. We couldn't tell you, okay, here's how to train graduate students so they become the good ones, not the mediocre ones. Same way we don't know that it's about detectives. Number of years ago, I was doing some work with the Cincinnati Police robbery unit and they were interested in bank robberies. I don't know that we had that many of them, but it was one of our interests and someone got wind that a bank robber who was relatively well known had been just released from federal prison and they wanted to talk with him, not about closing cases, but just how he thought, how he went about doing his robberies.

**John Eck:**

So we located the guy and he was interested in actually talking to the detectives. So instead of bringing him down to a police thing, we brought them into the criminal justice department. We had it just the faculty conference room. Two detectives, this guy, and I just sat there listening. I think I asked one question during the whole thing was fascinated. I couldn't decide whether to listen to the former bank robber or the detectives because they were equally fascinating.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

The questions themselves tell you a lot about what they know and what they don't know because they're trying to fill knowledge gaps for them, which means questions they're not asking are areas where they think they know the answer.

**John Eck:**

Yeah. Well, the two detectives were fascinating because what they would do is, first of all, their body language and the way they ask questions really expressed a lot of empathy for the guy. I don't know how they felt personally about him. I don't think they were lying in any fundamental sense, but they clearly had a way of trying to make this guy, who was nervous, comfortable as much as they could.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, that's good work.

**John Eck:**

And the way they work as a team to get him to answer questions was fascinating to watch. I couldn't tell you how to translate that into educating a new detective, how to be like that. They seem to have something that they were doing that might not be available to other detectives. So I think there is something there, but I don't know how we capture that.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That what's nice about that is just the interest in itself. I think too many times, detectives are in this great opportunity to speak to somebody and understand what opportunities in the criminal environment that offenders are exploiting, what criminals are exploiting. But all we do is investigate long enough and interview long enough to get a confession that will result in a prosecution and a conviction. But not any deeper understanding of the environment. And does that come back to your sense of where the detective contribution is limited in terms of public safety?

**John Eck:**

So it seems to me, we could refocus detective work, investigative work, in two areas, which I think would be productive in a way from trying to assume that it has a huge impact on public safety. One is, as you described justice. Do we have the right people in front of us or are they innocent or just not as guilty as we would assumed. The other part is capturing an understanding of the crime process itself, and then feeding that back into a prevention process. Right now, we don't really tap detective expertise.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Not at all.

**John Eck:**

Not at all.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So in Philadelphia, they're not even in the same buildings.

**John Eck:**

Right.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So how do we pass that knowledge and that expertise that the detectors have learned from their interviews and their investigations, into the crime prevention function when they're not even in the same building?

**John Eck:**

Over the years, I've tried in various ways to try and get detectives interested in doing problem solving work. And occasionally you can get one or two by some quirk of their personalities who are interested, but mostly it doesn't work.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right.

**John Eck:**

And I think one of the reasons it doesn't work is, most of them actually really like the investigative bits, right? The prevention bits are not that interesting to them. But you can either fight that, in which case you basically disrupt their work, or you can say, okay, well, you like the investigative parts of it, but you still have a lot of information for prevention. So maybe the thing to do would be to pair them or have some prevention people who could debrief them on a regular basis. Detectives can do the investigative work, which they enjoy and they're good at, mostly. And the prevention people could find a way of tapping that expertise and then using that expertise to help forestall these criminal events.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It sets up an organizational challenge, just trying to make all these different organizational components all work together.

**John Eck:**

Yeah. I mean, they're good at what they do.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Oh, sure.

**John Eck:**

So why would we want to say, don't do that, do something you're not interested in and you may not be all that good at. We can get people who are good at prevention. And what we want them to do is talk to the detectives more and occasionally get the detectives to do things like debrief offenders, debrief victims, not to solve cases, but to find out how crime processes work. And I think if we could do that, we could make some substantial progress.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And you think that's a more valuable contribution than the worry we have that's going around at the moment about worrying about where the clearance rates are?

**John Eck:**

I think the clearance rates we should just ignore, totally ignore them. It's like so many other metrics in society, they're completely useless, they take us in the wrong direction, and we do this repeatedly.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, how low can go before we really start worrying about them? Because I do some work in Central America where homicide clearance rates are in single digits.

**John Eck:**

Right. It's not that the idea of paying attention to, did you actually solve anything? I actually don't want them to show up at work and do nothing. Right?. But it's like everything else, the idea, okay, well maybe we should measure outcomes. Okay. I'm fine with that. I'm a quantification kind of person. I've always been that way. And the obsession is really what drives it. It totally gets in the way of actual productive work. And you and I have described this whole stupid phenomenon going on in academia where everything is scored, right? And you look around and say, does that produce anything useful? No. But clearly there has to be some way of saying, system professor X, you suck. And it has to be reasonably objective.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

A lot of things get scored, but not necessarily the things that really matter.

**John Eck:**

Yeah, exactly.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Some obscure article in the Bangladeshi Journal of [inaudible 00:18:48] and Criminology counts, even though nobody's ever going to read it or cite it, but writing something in Police Chief Magazine that will be read by everybody in policing.

**John Eck:**

Right. When I was studying burglary and robbery investigations, the thing that led to the triage hypothesis you described, I was hanging out with some detectives in three different cities and their approach to clearance rates were wildly different. And one of them, basically, if they capture one guy and if he fessed up to a zillion burglaries, they were happy. So they would drive him around, did you do that one? Did you do that? Yeah. I did that, I did that, I did that, because there was no consequences, right? They could have pointed to a house where there was never a burglary and he would have confessed to it, right?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

We used to call it offenses taken into consideration.

**John Eck:**

Exactly. But in another city I was working, they say, look, you don't have an arrest and a charge? You don't have a clearance. And so they were incredibly rigorous in how their application, but we take those numbers, we throw them into the same pot.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And we measure clearances nationally, down to the digit. There's no rounding taking place because we've got such precision in our data capture.

**John Eck:**

Exactly, yeah. You look at a department, it has a low clearance rate and you say, oh, these guys suck. Maybe, but it might be that they're just actually pretty diligent about what they call a clearance, right? They know actually much more about what's going on than other people. They just are not willing to accept weak information.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Or their clearances are, they focus the energies on the cases that are likely to spur retaliation. They're likely to have follow on events. If we're going to cherry pick which cases we solve that are going to be some cases that are far more valuable to the system to solve than others.

**John Eck:**

The further you get from the human element, the less useful they become. So I can imagine a detective sergeant or detective lieutenant, or somebody who's in charge of a unit paying attention to his or her people's clearance rates. But that supervisor knows those people personally, has watched their work, and can say something more than just the number.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah.

**John Eck:**

Now it moves up the chain of command to someone who doesn't know those people. And they've now put it in a report and it just moves up in another layer and they don't know the report. Now the person looking at it has no clue as to what these people are doing and they're yelling and screaming about the low clearance rates. Now it's useless.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

There's an interesting research value when cases are randomly assigned. Whoever's next in the rotation picks up the case. And that's interesting to study, but you also want to be in a city where detectives are allocated to the cases that they have the characteristics they're most likely to solve. But that means that some detectives are going to get really difficult cases with a small chance to solve them, but they're the only person in the office who has a chance of doing so. And other detectors in the office will pick up the easy cases because the supervisor knows their people and thinks, you know what? This case can go to Bob.

**John Eck:**

In patrol, we've made a huge amount of progress by paying very close attention to patterns. Crime hotspots and a series of things that are connected to each other. I'm not certain the investigative work we've done that kind of work on a routine basis. So it's quite likely you can get detectives with the same offenders that are behind it. They're working on those cases and not knowing it. So bringing that pattern orientation into-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

The same detective working cases, they're linked, or we've got a bunch of linked cases, but they've been assigned to different detectives.

**John Eck:**

Exactly, yeah. So it's more scattered.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And I think that's highly likely in the US with such a fragmented and decentralized policing system.

**John Eck:**

Yep, right. So I think there's some work to be done there. To be honest with you though, I think unless we refocus investigations both on the justice side and the prevention side, fiddling around with the internal organization is not going to help much. It goes through cycles, decentralize the detectives, centralize them again.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And maybe it only works for whatever's right for that organization to achieve those goals of being more prevention focused.

**John Eck:**

Well, and they have benefits. So centralization has the benefit of, you've got the people in the same room, they can coordinate much better, but then you lose local knowledge. So you decentralize. Well now you've declined on the coordination bit, but you've got the local knowledge. So there's that trade off. So picking one or the other is never going to be a solution. So we oscillate between them. So you get a detective commander who's into the decentralization. Well, that's what you get. And that'll work for a while until the number of complaints about, oh, we can't do this, blah, blah, blah. The new detective commander says, "That sucks. This is really the worst way of doing." Well we'll re-centralize it. And that works for while, he goes back and forth back, back and forth, back and forth.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But John, I think you're missing the point. Every time a new commander comes in and makes a big change they get promoted because the initiative they took.

**John Eck:**

Exactly.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You talked about the value of taking the lessons learned from what we have about hotspots policing. And so your recent work has been focused on micro levels and understanding areas for intervention in neighborhoods and smaller levels.

**John Eck:**

I really dislike the notion of neighborhoods. I think that we become obsessed with that. And I think there's a lot of reasons from academia, principally and politically, why we do that. But the fact of the matter is crime is extremely local. And every time you come up with a geographic unit, the neighborhood or the street segment, you can find high variation within it. So right now, given our technology, we can see the address level hotspots reasonably well if the department is doing a reasonable job of geo-locating its crimes.

**John Eck:**

But we don't do, on a routine basis, is asked why is this address such a problem? And the addressed on either side of it are not. So going to things that are very small has several advantages. One is, the scale of the intervention doesn't have to be all that big. And second, you have somebody who you can hold accountable. With anything larger than a street segment or neighborhood, there is no one hold accountable. In any kind of society where property ownership has a high legal standing and there's laws around it, that confers upon you specific property rights and responsibilities. And we can hold those people accountable for that.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

At that geographic scale, even though it's not an owned location, do you also consider and include the street corner?

**John Eck:**

Yes. But that is actually owned. It's just owned by the municipality, right? Question you would have about a street corner is, is it literally the street corner or are we getting spill out effects from the businesses located on the street corner?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right.

**John Eck:**

And of course, you've got to filter out things like traffic accidents, which clearly are in the street corner, but not really what we're talking about. Virtually every single morsel of property in the US has an owner. You can go to some government office and you can find it. Occasionally, you'll run across weird things that don't have any clear owners. My wife and I are interested in cemetery restoration and there are some abandoned cemeteries. So it's really unclear who actually owns that. This is where my theory would break down, except for that weird quirky thing that only a few of us nerdy cemetery restoration people understand, the rest of it, you can find the owner.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

The approach then is, as much as possible, if you want to really implement crime prevention in neighborhoods, take it down to the location that is owned by one entity so that we can have leverage against them?

**John Eck:**

Well, think about how we think about neighborhoods. The typical way we think about neighborhoods is we think about their residents. And that works nicely if you have a low crime, relatively middle class or upper middle class or wealthy neighborhood, because everybody who lives there, owns their property mostly. Now you go to a poor neighborhood with a lot of crime. Are they owners? No they're renters, right? Do they have control of their property? No, they have almost no control, right? Some of them don't even have leases.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But if the property is just a shell, then surely isn't the problem the people who are in there and to some degree, so that we're blaming the landlord, who could be in a different state, for the behavior of the people. So once you get down to an individual property size, we're talking about the behavior of human beings, which is causing the problem, right?

**John Eck:**

Right now my wife and I rent a condominium. We have a lease and it tells us what we can do on that property and what we can't do. Our landlord who's a nice guy, and we work very well with him, but he has control over our behavior to some degree. We start making trouble for the people on either side of us, below or above us, someone's going to tell him, and it's going to come back on us.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But that requires him to give a damn.

**John Eck:**

It does require him to give a damn.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I think a lot of landlords in most places don't.

**John Eck:**

Particularly in poor areas. In a wealthy area, the landlord does because they don't want that income stream from all of those other high paying tenants to get disrupted. Whereas in a poor area, they're lucky to have somebody rent it and give them money. So that's why for example, and this is how I got into this area, why drug dealers will show up in poor areas, not in a rich area. Even if the rich area are consuming as many drugs, the poor area, the landlord is not going to pay as much attention to the drug dealer because the drug dealer can pay in cash on a regular basis.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Which probably puts them head and shoulders above many of the other people renting.

**John Eck:**

Exactly.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

From the landlord's perspective.

**John Eck:**

From the landlord's perspective, and I don't want to say that landlords are uniformly bad, or even most of them are bad. It's like everything else, most of them do a pretty good job or at least are attempting to. A few of them are terrible. A number of years ago, we did something which I don't know that anyone else has ever done. What we did is, we took all of the crime hotspots, the high crime places in Cincinnati and found out who owned them. And then we aggregated the crime at all those spots to the owners and as who owns crime. And so what we find out is that with apartment buildings, most owners have little or no crime in their apartment buildings.

**John Eck:**

A few owners have most of the crime in Cincinnati. And so if we start asking the question who owns the crime? We end up with a complete different set of solutions. Take broken windows theory. Now broken windows is this metaphor for disorder, right? And as we say, well, broken windows, if it goes un-repaired, people are going to start doing worse things, they're going to get robbed. People are going to move. The whole neighborhood goes down. Right? But because they never took broken windows seriously, they never asked the question who owns the fucking window and why didn't they repair it? Because ultimately that's what counts.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And it became a policing thing. Not a, who owns the window.

**John Eck:**

Yeah, who owns the window? Right.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Why is it the job of the police to be the glazers?

**John Eck:**

Exactly. Yes. Is glazing taught into police academy?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

For the amount of [inaudible 00:29:17] there is in policing probably will be soon. Now that police are dealing with mental health and-

**John Eck:**

So someone is going to hear this podcast and get it backwards. Right? And they're going to start going up and telling their training academy to teach glazing.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It's a new academy class, there you go.

**John Eck:**

We'll be blamed for this.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Is that where broken windows possibly went wrong?

**John Eck:**

I think broken windows has the same problems that community policing has. It starts off with a resident focus. It assumes that residents can exercise a huge amount of control over crime, but-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

There's a lot of will in Central America, in El Salvador. But when you're up against armed gangs-

**John Eck:**

Exactly. So I'm not a big proponent of that from either perspective, community policing or broken windows, because I think that in our high crime areas, it doesn't make a lot of sense.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

The residents just doesn't have the power necessarily.

**John Eck:**

They don't have the power. Let's face it, it's difficult being poor. It takes a lot of time and energy to be poor. They're working multiple jobs or searching for jobs, they're on buses. They don't have a lot of free time. So they're going to get together in a meeting in the evening with no childcare and actually exercise some kind of control? On occasion, they will. And those are the ones that end up in the headlines. And those are the ones we invite to conferences. And we see the same community leaders year in and year out showing up. And that's the signal. If you've got the same people showing up all the time and not hundreds of new ones coming in, then it's not working.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It's stagnating.

**John Eck:**

You've got the weird person who can do it, not the normal person who can do it. I think it just misdirected. The control over these neighborhoods is more based in the owners of these properties and people who finance the properties. So one of my doctoral students is just finishing up her PhD in the neighborhood right next to where I live. And I walk through at daily, it's a transitional neighborhood. And what she did was interview the people who buy and sell property and real estate, rehab businesses and ask them about their decision making process. And they make decisions that have crime influences.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Such as?

**John Eck:**

So one of the people she interviewed said, "I will not lease my property or even sell it to a check cashing company. I won't even do it to a bank or tax preparing." And so she asked, "Why tax preparing?" You don't think of that. She says, "Because they're only open for a few months out of the year, the rest of it's a closed storefront. There's no one looking out on the street." And he saw that is that these kinds of businesses actually don't contribute to the social welfare of it.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Almost out to the urban desert have eyes on the street.

**John Eck:**

Exactly. And the eyes on the street is an important idea because this is always attributed to Jane Jacobs. One of the points, my doctoral student, Shannon Lining came up with, she went back and read carefully Jane Jacobs, wonderful work, Death and Life of Great American Cities. It came out in 1961. It's as valuable today as it was then.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It's a great read.

**John Eck:**

It is absolutely fantastic. The first section deals a lot with disorder and who controls it. And that's where the eyes on the street comes from. And it's interpreted as, it's the eyes of the residents, the eyes of the pedestrian, right? That's not who her eyes are, the eyes of the shopkeeper. It's the barber, it's the person who's selling the fruit or the magazines in the 1950s and early 60s. And today it would be other folks. Bars are a major source of social control. So we've

completely misinterpreted her work. And at the same time, what we've done in modern cities when we've destroyed [inaudible 00:32:58] is we've got rid of all those small businesses.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You see banks coming out on street corners and they just kill the corner at that point.

**John Eck:**

Exactly.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Because not that many people use banks anymore.

**John Eck:**

Right.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And there's no surveillance of the street. They have limited hours and you put a couple of banks on an intersection and it really kills the corner.

**John Eck:**

Yep. So in the neighborhood that she's looking at, they are bringing that kind of business, not the banks, but the small time business owners. And they do have interest in the control of the street. On my walk to school, I've walked through that. And so I can see that coming up. And then I walk near the university where the another development thing has ripped out all of the old buildings and put in new ones and it's all national chains. Not a single one of those things has anybody looking out and if they are, there's some young college students who don't give a damn and don't know what to do.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah. They have no investment.

**John Eck:**

They have no investment in that area. And what's nice about cities now with a lot of redevelopment is that there is more attention to developing areas with an idea for small scale dynamic properties that can exert a small level of influence in the area, right around their business. And if you can get enough density of that, then you start getting some social control over it. And the residents then can make use of it. And what the residents and pedestrians do is bring resources into those small businesses. That's their primary function. The eyes are from the business outward because that small business owner has a strong interest in safety around their property.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So it's really, as you've started off, it's really not about neighborhoods. It's, crime control is right down to individual properties and locations and that micro level control. And enough of that expand out, we end up with safety.

**John Eck:**

Right. And the flip side of it is, you get in very dysfunctional neighborhoods, these businesses which exploit things. So the same neighborhood that I'm talking about, new things coming in, going back about a decade or so, there was a location which was arguably a convenience store, but it was really a cover for a drug dealing operation. And what the guy who ran that business did it was he employed the local addicts to go across the street, to the chain, grocery store and steal stuff. He would pay them in drugs. He would then take those goods and put it on his shelves and sell them for a dollar less than the grocery store across the street. So he was radiating crime out from that location. One address probably produced a shit load a crime in the surrounding neighborhood. When the police finally, with help from some of the local property owners, actually were able to successfully close that place down and seize control over it. Sold it the back to the local redevelopment foundation, which is in the process of rehabbing. When they did that, crime dropped.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

What a great way to think about how to use focused investigations. That's where the investigative power really comes in.

**John Eck:**

And you've interviewed Tamara who talks-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

With the Pivot Project.

**John Eck:**

With the Pivot Project, and that is exactly that kind of thing.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

We have a podcast with her.

**John Eck:**

Yeah.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

A great way to tie it all together. John, every conversation I have with you is fascinating.

**John Eck:**

Great.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Thanks very much.

**John Eck:**

Thank you.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You've been listening to episode eight of Reducing Crime recorded in Copenhagen in November, 2018. You can find more podcasts like this at [reducingcrime.com](http://reducingcrime.com) or the usual podcasty places. New podcasts are announced on Twitter @\_reducingcrime. Don't forget the underscore. Be safe and best of luck.