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◆ ◆ Crime and ◆ Public Policy

◆ ◆ ◆ Throughout this book, we have argued that the dramatic expansion of the U.S. penal system is a consequence of the politicization of crime-related issues. Over the past three decades, politicians have kept the issues of crime and drug abuse at the top of the national agenda and have framed these issues in ways that suggest a need for a harsher and more expansive system of criminal justice. This interpretation of crime and related issues has been amplified through the mass media and, from time to time, has resonated with large segments of the American public.

The political obsession with crime and the spread of support for “getting tough” has precipitated a series of policy developments:

- ◆ massive increases in drug arrests
- ◆ new, more punitive sentencing schemes
- ◆ revival of capital punishment
- ◆ retreat from juvenile justice
- ◆ hardening of prison regimes
- ◆ intensification of community surveillance

In this chapter, we take a closer look at these policies and practices, paying particular attention to their significance for criminal punishment. In the last section, we examine the implications of these changes for the control of crime and for the quality of social life more generally.