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Introduction

HISTORY & CRIME

Why write this book? We like the popular metaphor of 'the elephant in the room' - a large issue which nobody mentions even though it is difficult to ignore. In criminology and crime history we appear to have two elephants in a very small room which both ignore each other. This volume intends to explore the relationship (mainly in Chapter 2) and to explore some areas where historical study can offer much to criminological understanding, and vice versa.

This book could have chosen any number of topics to explore. Each of the topics we finally selected will illustrate the utility of combining criminological and historical knowledge, but there are many others that would be equally valid that we have left unexplored for reasons of space. We have in fact limited ourselves to six subjects which meet most if not all of the following criteria:

- The topics are (hopefully) interesting and entertaining as self-contained enquiries.
- They are perennial criminological concerns which have not benefited from a dialogue between historians and criminologists, i.e. the construction and validity of criminal statistics (Chapter 3) or the history of surveillance (Chapter 7).
- The topics have been prematurely consigned to the dustbin of history, i.e. the local control and governance of the police (Chapter 4); the problem of mass incarceration and the possibilities of decarceration (Chapter 8).
- They are 'live topics' in that they are currently perceived as important criminological topics - street crime, public disorder, immigration (Chapters 5 and 6).

The book is meant to be accessible to a wide range of people: undergraduates and postgraduates; academic experts working at the intersection of crime history/criminology; or those with a general interest. To that end we have devised a clear structure, with further reading for those who want to deepen their interest, and suggestions for study questions.

Following this introduction, in Chapter 1 we attempt to describe the separate developments of crime history and criminology, and how they have overlapped and converged in recent years. The chapter presents a chronology which can be found in the standard textbooks, but raises some contentious questions about who and what has been included under the auspices of history and what has ruled in and ruled out of the discipline of criminology. Subsequent chapters then explore the contribution that historical perspectives can make to modern criminological studies, and pressing issues of crime, policing, surveillance and punishment in the twenty-first century.

Chapter 3 interrogates the reasons why criminal statistics were originally compiled and the uses to which they were put. Positivist, interactionist and pessimistic approaches to crime statistics are discussed. Each of those perspectives has a view on the accuracy, validity and possible manipulations of crime numbers and crime rates. The chapter concludes by insisting that taking a longer perspective on the collection of crime data can inform us not so much about trends and amounts as the underlying rationales for collecting, collating and studying crime statistics.

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The validity of crime statistics is a long standing one in both historical and criminological circles. Police governance, however, has drifted in and out of fashion as a topic of study. Chapter 4 explains how local control over police forces has been eroded in recent years – and is far from the structure envisaged by nineteenth-century models of governance. Yet, the topic is set to re-emerge in the near future, with the reorganization of police forces into larger administrative units that cross County jurisdictions, and with the possibility of a national force controlled by the Ministry of Justice.

Chapter 5 explores a subject that has been debated by psychologists, psychiatrists, social investigators, criminologists, historians and cultural theorists for over 100 years. These debates over the persistent or habitual offenders have been given a new twist latterly with New Labour's determination to stamp down on 'the hard core of offenders who blight our inner cities' within a general rhetoric of inclusivity and social welfare. This chapter, and Chapter 6, both chart the processes of exclusion for the poor, marginalized and immigrant members of British society. They show how conceptions about the nature of criminals, and about ethnic minorities, have directed the criminal justice system towards iniquitous and unjust dispositions.

Chapter 6 attacks the idea that the settled peaceable kingdom has been periodically unsettled by waves of unruly, uncivilized violent immigrants (Irish and East European Jewish settlers in the nineteenth century, the West Indian and Commonwealth immigration of the 1960s and 1970s, and more recently, again, fears about Eastern Europeans). The chapter unpicks attitudes towards social change, and how the criminal justice system has often been the instrument used to control 'problem' communities.

Chapter 7 also takes a long view, this time of the growth of surveillance in society. It outlines some prevailing models of surveillance and control that evolved in the nineteenth-century factory system. It then traces the faltering steps of CCTV to the point where there are now 4 million cameras in the UK – more than there are in the whole of the United States. Lastly, it re-evokes and re-examines Bentham's Panopticon, the 'ideal prison' of the eighteenth-century imagination, and one that has proved influential over social theorists in recent decades.

Chapter 8 concludes the book with a examination of mass imprisonment – how did we get to the position of having the highest ever number of people imprisoned in this country in 2007, and one of the highest per capita rates of imprisonment in the Western world? It traces the development of forms of punishment, together with the aims of deterrence, rehabilitation and incapacitation that drove them. It ends by questioning whether, at the seemingly height of the power and use of the prison, we are actually about to enter a period when decarceration and community penalties can actually dominate the punitive landscape?