SOCl 328: Panopticon and the People: Digital Approaches to the History of Crime and Punishment

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Overview

*Panopticon and the People* examines how contemporary issues in crime and justice, including persistence and desistance, youth crime, female offending and gang crime, have been treated historically from the eighteenth century. Taking advantage of online historical datasets including Digital Panopticon (a project based in this department), British Library 19th Century Newspapers Online, Old Bailey Online, Founders and Survivors, and London Lives, this module will introduce students to the interpretation of a vast range of historic criminal justice records. Using innovative digital techniques, students will be able to trace and evaluate the lives of offenders and reflect upon the extent to which they negotiated and challenged the punitive state. Students will gain knowledge of historical methods and debates, engage with criminological perspectives and approaches, and gain transferrable digital skills.

Online Resources

We will be using the online databases listed below for each session and you are expected to engage with them throughout the course of the module. These sites also provide extra reading lists and background information.

**Ancestry**
http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/eds/detail/detail?vid=3&sid=478bb9e4-a8a2-4a49-9825-54bb61d284b7%40sessionmgr4010&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWRzLWxpdmUmc2NvcGU9c210ZQ%3d%3d#AN=lvp.b2653088&db=cat00003a.

**Digital Panopticon**> https://www.digitalpanopticon.org

**Founders and Survivors**> https://www.foundersandsurvivors.org

**Old Bailey Online** > https://www.oldbaileyonline.org

**Locating London’s Past** > https://www.locatinglondon.org/

**London Lives** > https://www.londonlives.org/

**British Library 19th Century Newspapers Online**

**London Low Life: Street Culture, Social Reform and the Victorian Underworld:**
http://www.londonlowlife.amdigital.co.uk.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/

**Telegraph Historical Archive, 1855-2000:**

**The Times Digital Archive 1785-2011**
http://find.galegroup.com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/ttda/start.do?prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=livuni
Further datasets, such as 19th Century British Periodicals, are available here: http://libguides.liverpool.ac.uk.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/az.php?a=pound

You will find a more extensive reading list, grouped by theme (eg. Courts, prisons, etc) by following the Reading Lists @ Liverpool link on the SOCI 328 VITAL page.

Join Online Conversations:
Historians often continue their conversations online with a Twitter feed essentially taking the place of the seminar. Below is a selected list of Twitter handles of crime historians.

@crimehistorian @helenrogers19c @timhitchcock @digipanoptic @19thC_Offenders @emmadwatkins @sickandpoor @historyatNmpton @sharon_howard

Syllabus in Detail

Week 1: The Panopticon and the People: Introduction to the History of Crime and Punishment

The first lecture will provide you with an introduction to digital crime history and draw attention to key thematic, theoretical and methodological principles, issues and debates.

The seminar will introduce you to a range of online resources and datasets that we will use throughout the module. Each group will be allocated a resource to critically examine and reflect back on their assessments in class. What can these sites tell us and what do they obscure? How user friendly are they? What potential research questions might we ask the sites? What problems does digitization pose? How do commercial companies like Ancestry and Find my Past restrict innovative academic research?

Key Readings:

Further Reading:


Week 2: Prisons, Press, and People: Approaching Digital Crime History

Following on from session 1, this lecture and seminar will focus on ways of interpreting primary sources i.e. texts, images, and narratives that were produced during the nineteenth century.

In the seminar, we will apply critical discourse analysis to a series of crime narratives including newspaper reports and court and prison records. How authoritative are these narratives? In what ways can we acknowledge and filter the dominant values inherent in criminal records? How can we retrieve offenders’ experiences of crime and punishment from these records?

Key Reading:


Further Reading:


This lecture will provide an overview of historians' use of genealogical techniques to construct ‘cradle to grave’ histories of Victorian offenders. Following on from influential criminological studies by Sampson and Laub (1996; 2001), works by Godfrey et al (2007; 2010; 2017) suggest that desistance takes place away from the criminal justice system and is encouraged by familial support, residential stability and employment opportunities. We will consider how life course criminological approaches can be reproduced through online genealogical sources such as birth, marriage and death records, military registers, and the census alongside criminal records.

In the seminar, we will act as ‘Digital Detectives’ and utilize online resources to create a life history of a Victorian offender. Using sites including Ancestry, British Library Newspapers Online, Digital Panopticon, and Old Bailey Online, we will use innovative record linking strategies to synthesise biographical and criminal information on a nineteenth-century criminal. In doing so, we will reflect on the potentials and pitfalls of this methodology and consider the extent to which offenders are more than the sum of their convictions.

Key Readings:


Indicative Reading:


**Week 4: City, Courtroom, Colony: The History of Transportation and Constructing Convict Lives.**

Transportation was finally abolished in 1857 following Australia’s refusal to accept any more convicts from the British state. Prior to this date, thousands of men, women and children were transported from Britain to Australia. This session will trace the lives of transportees and reflect on the impact transportation had upon the lives of offenders in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. But we will also consider ways in which transported felons constructed their own identities by exploring the remaining fragments of their lives including their tattoos, love tokens, and letters.

**Key Reading:**


You should also watch two introductory videos created by Emma Watkins, a PhD student from the Digital Panopticon project, who is based here in the Department.

Part 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zysvVYFWtaY

Part 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5twcw1_Uxko&feature=youtu.be

Further Reading:


R. Hughes, The fatal shore: a history of the transportation of convicts to Australia, 1787-1868 (1987)


Jordan, Thomas E. "Transported to Van Diemen’s Land: The Boys of the Frances Charlotte (1832) and Lord Goderich (1841)." *Child Development* 56 (1985): 1092-1099.


Week 5: The Real Artful Dodgers: Youth, Crime, and Imprisonment, 1780-Present.

This session will provide an overview of youth crime and justice across the nineteenth to early twentieth century. We will explore the fears and demonization directed towards Victorian youth and examine how those fears impacted on the increasing criminalization and control of young people. But we will also explore a collection of young criminal lives and assess the experiences of young offenders in Victorian Britain.

In the seminar, we will locate, clean and transcribe text from datasets such as admission registers from Stockport Industrial Schools and the Report of the Committee in to the State of Juvenile Crime in the Metropolis and upload this to Wordle. Wordle is a data visualization tool that highlights dominant patterns in text-based data. We will also use these resources to trace young offenders from industrial schools to examine the lives of Victorian England’s real artful dodgers.

Key Reading:


Further Reading:


Week 6: Victims or Perpetrators? Female Offending in the Past, Present and Future

In this session we will look at how the digital environment can inform us about the ‘reality’ of women’s experiences of crime and punishment. We will explore prostitution in Victorian England and explore the backgrounds and livelihoods of sex workers in Victorian England. Do their experiences suggest they are perpetrators of crime or victims of a patriarchal state?

Key Readings:


L. Williams (blog) https://waywardwomen.wordpress.com/

Indicative Reading:


D’Cruze, S., Everyday Violence in Britain: Gender and Class (London: Longman, 2000)


**Week 8: Gang Crime: Gender, Violence, and Everyday Life**

In this session we will explore the worlds of ‘violent Victorians’. We will look behind sensationalist narratives about violent crime and explore how violence punctured everyday life. We will draw upon primary case studies, including the Scuttlers and the Peaky Blinders, to consider patterns of violent offending in nineteenth century Britain and evaluate how identities were constructed, contested and performed in the everyday setting of the streets and home.

In the seminar, we will use case studies of violent and persistent offenders and map their crimes and addresses. We will reflect upon theories of masculinity and crime posited by, for example, Messerschmidt and Connell, and consider ways in which the behavior of Victorian gang members is a lens for exploring Victorian working-class masculinities.

**Key Readings:**

Z. Alker (2014) Street Violence in mid-Victorian Liverpool. (Introduction, Chapter 5)


Indicative Readings:


Davies, A., Gangs of Manchester: The Story of the Scuttlers, Britain’s First Youth Cult (Preston: Milo Books, 2008)


**Week 9: Viral Victorians: Crime reporting and moral panics in the nineteenth century**

In this lecture we will explore what went ‘viral’ in the Victorian period by looking at crime reporting and the press in nineteenth-century Britain. Drawing upon Stanley Cohen’s moral panic model, we will examine how media-led fears about crime and punishment resulted in increasing state control. We will look at the mid nineteenth-century garroting (street robbery) panics as a case study.

In the seminar, we will use British Library 19th Century Newspapers Online to explore and contest Cohen’s moral panic. Cohen argues that moral panic...
are triggered by an intense and brief period of media attention. Performing keyword searches [e.g. <garroting> and <street violence>] of Victorian newspapers including the Guardian and The Times, means that we can put Cohen’s model to the test. Was there a moral panic over street robbery in the middle decades of the nineteenth century or have the assumptions of historians, such as Jennifer Davis and Robert Sindall, been incorrect?

Key Readings:


Indicative Reading:


Week 10: Problematising the Gaze: Using Virtual Reality to examine theories of imprisonment and power

Bentham’s Panopticon was imagined as the ‘ideal’ prison: designed as a circular building with prisoners’ cells arranged around the outer wall and dominated by a central inspection tower. From the tower the prison inspector would be able to gaze upon the prisoners at all times and monitor their behaviours. Bentham’s ideals sought to observe, transform, and discipline prisoners through architectural design.

Due to its escalating cost, Bentham’s Panopticon was never built, but advances in 3D modelling software and virtual reality hardware (Oculus Rift), means that we can now see the Panopticon, but also venture inside (Alker and Webb, 2016).

The Panopticon has become the dominant symbol for Foucauldian understandings of surveillance which emphasize power as manifested through the ubiquitous disciplinary gaze. ‘He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication’ (Foucault, 1975: 201). And it is this very notion- the power of the gaze and the power relations that manifest through the architecture of surveillance that we will investigate in this session. Is 24-hour surveillance possible? What opportunities did offenders have to resist strict prison regimes? By exploring the virtual Panopticon and examining prisoner behavior via resources including Prison Licenses, we will critically evaluate Foucault’s theory of the disciplinary gaze.

Key Reading:


http://activehistory.ca/2017/02/the-presence-of-the-past-the-possibilities-of-virtual-reality-for-history/

Indicative Readings:

A. Brown, English society and the prison: time, culture, and politics in the development of the modern prison, 1850-1920 (2003)

C. Emsley, Crime and society in England, 1750-1900 (2010), Chapter 10

N. Morris and D. Rothmans (eds), The Oxford history of the prison: the practice of punishment in western society (1995), Chapters 3, 5, 10, 11

J. Sharpe, Judicial punishment in England (1990), Chapter 3


W. Forsythe, The reform of prisoners, 1830-1900 (1987)


S. McConville, English local prisons, 1860-1900: next only to death (1995)


M. Ignatieff, 'State, civil society and total institutions: a critique of recent social histories of punishment' in S. Cohen and A. Scull (eds), Social control and the state: historical and comparative essays (1983)


U. Henriques, 'The rise and decline of the separate system of prison discipline', Past and Present, 54 (1972)

M. De Lacy, Prison reform in Lancashire, 1700-1850: a study in local administration (1986) -

M. De Lacy, 'Grinding men good? Lancashire's prisons at mid-century' in V. Bailey


S. Grass (2003), The self in the cell: narrating the Victorian prisoner

**Week 11: Digitisation and crime history**

In week 10, we will reflect upon the impact of digitization on crime history as a methodology and consider possible future directions.

In the seminar, we will reflect on the sources and methods we have gathered on the module, and continue to produce the data visualisations for Assessment 2.

**Key Reading:**


**Further Reading:**


Greengrass, Mark, and Hughes, Lorna (eds), The Virtual Representation of the Past (Aldershot, 2008).


**Week 12: Module Conclusion and Assessment Guidance**

In the final lecture we will conclude the main themes, debates, and approaches on the module and provide guidance for assessment 2. Seminars will be available as ‘drop-in’ sessions and provide an opportunity to discuss and develop your research for assignment 2.

There are no set readings for this week, but you should spend allocated reading time preparing for your assignment.

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**Assessment**

There are two assessments to complete on the module:

**Assessment 1:** 1500 word blog post that presents a criminal ‘life’ (30% of module mark).

For assessment 1, you will utilize your record linkage skills to construct a ‘criminal life’ using the recently launched Digital Panopticon resource (a project based in the Department of Sociology, Social Policy, and Criminology). You will critically examine the criminal life in light of historical and criminological debates and methods and the wider themes of the module.

You will also evaluate the authority of curated historical datasets for exploring criminal histories: what aspects of offenders’ life course are exposed by historical datasets and what do they obscure? How is this complicated by the bias and selectivity of Victorian record-keeping about criminals? And how do social resources including the census remind us that criminals’ interactions with the criminal justice system were interventions in ordinary, if difficult, lives.

**Assessment 2:** 2500 word essay on an analysis of data produced on the module (70% of module mark).

For your essay, you will complete an essay based upon a topic covered on the module. You must utilize evidence that you have produced in class and contextualise your research findings within historical and criminological debates. You will choose from a broad range of topics covered on the module. For example, you may want to supplement statistics on young people imprisoned at the Old Bailey with a young criminal life or create a Sankey diagram which maps desistance across time and place by using the Digital Panopticon resource. Or you may want to explore the spatial dynamics of gang crime by mapping an offenders’ territory. You can adopt a comparative approach or draw upon either/or quantitative and qualitative techniques.

A full list of topics is outlined below.

The production of your data, whether that be quantitative and/or qualitative, will form part of the evidence you use to construct your argument. This is a research-led piece of work and you will draw upon the various tools and sources provided by the online resources we have explored on the module. In doing so, you will reflect upon
academically-informed debates and theories and use evidence from historic and current data collections to conform to or challenge academic ideas and debates.

You will critically reflect on the validity of online resources and tools, consider the impact this has had upon your research and research design, reflect on the methodology/ies, but also critically assess how this data can be used to inform academic and popular debates about crime, criminal justice and punishment.

Topics:

- Juvenile offenders
- Violent crime/ violent offenders
- Female offending/ offenders
- Transported felons
- Punishment, eg. Transportation or imprisonment.
- Panopticonism
- The Disciplinary Gaze
- Ethics of digital crime history
- Crime history and the life course