



Crime and Punishment in Britain: The Penal System in Theory, Law, and Practice

By Russell Smith

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This book, first published in 1965, describes the British penal system as it existed in the 1960s. It describes how the system defined, accounted for, and disposed of offenders. As an early work in criminology, it focuses on differences between, and changes in, the views held by legislators, lawyers, philosophers, and the man in the street on the topic of crime and punishment. Walker is interested in the extent to which their views reflect the facts established and the theories propounded by psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists.

The confusion between criminologists and penal reformers was initially encouraged by criminologists themselves, many of whom were penal reformers. Strictly speaking, penal reform, according to Walker, was a spare-time occupation for criminologists, just as canvassing for votes is an ancillary task for political scientists. The difference is that the criminologist's spare-time occupation is more likely to take a "moral" form, and when it does so it is more likely to interfere with what should be purely criminological thoughts.

The machinery of justice involves the interaction of human beings in their roles of victim, offender, policeman, judge, supervisor, or custodian, and there must be a place for human sympathy in the understanding, and still more in the treatment, of individual offenders. This book is concerned with the efficiency of the system as a means to these ends. One of the main reasons why penal institutions have continued to develop more slowly than other social services is that they are a constant battlefield between emotions and prejudices. This is a great empirical study; against which the policy-maker and criminologist can measure progress or regression in British criminals and punishments.

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Editorial Review

Review

“This important book presents a sophisticated, scholarly, and immensely informative description and analysis of the subject announced in the title, but it is in reality more than the title suggests, and might perhaps be better described as a treatise on modern crime and punishment with Britain taken as the example. The author exhibits a rare combination of theoretical interest, analytical skill, a comprehensive grasp of relevant research, and detailed knowledge of the workings of the British system. His book should be of great interest not only to criminologists in his own country but also to those of other countries and especially to Americans... The book is a major contribution to the literature of modern penology and deserves wide reading and careful study.”

—Alfred Lindesmith, *American Journal of Sociology*

“This is a useful, and in some ways unusual, book.... [L]et it be said that Walker’s lonely eminence gives him valuable independence. His critical appraisal spares no one (and his demolition of some of Baroness Wootton’s arguments is fully worthy of his adversary) but it is quite clearly based on scientific doubt, and is expressed in moderate terms. As a long cool look at the *system* it deserves a good welcome.”

—J. P. Martin, *The British Journal of Sociology*

About the Author

Nigel Walker is Emeritus Wolfson Professor of Criminology and former director of the Institute of Criminology at the University of Cambridge. He is the author of numerous books, including *A Man without Loyalties*; *Behavior and Misbehavior*; and *Aggravation, Mitigation, and Mercy in English Criminal Justice*.

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