

FOREWORD | Better Late Than Never: Major Criminology Policy Changes

This journal will be especially timely in the coming years, perhaps regrettably. A new administration in Washington in 2021 doesn't necessarily result in major policy changes as far as attitudes towards crime, but this time around there may be a sea change in the United States legal remedies, and as a consequence possibly a rethink of world attitudes. Better late than never might be the retort.

President Biden has a special interest because of his frequent regrets and repudiation of his earlier attitudes while a United States Senator. He had a very hard nosed view of how to cope with crime, which had a good deal to do with draconian penalties and the incarceration of millions of people over the years for relatively minor offenses. He now belatedly concedes that more harm than good was done. A particular example was the criminalization of drug offenses, which destroyed many lives.

Indisputably the penalties were particularly harmful to the African American community. Cynics might point out that their votes were especially important to the Biden victory at the polls, but his remorse and call for reversal of sentencing policies seems genuine.

There has been a sort of Oxford Union debate between countries for years about the severity of punishment, with the American courts handing out what in many other countries would be regarded as virtually life sentences. Certainly, this will be an area where an acceleration in policy repair can be expected.

Moreover, the maxim that new occasions teach new duties again will prove true. Computer offenses have been increasing, and we all know too well that hacking no longer applies to horse drawn carriages in parks. Lindbergh style child snatching has been supplanted by holding data for ransom, which has become an alarming trend. Nor are the police appearances at Friday end-of-the-week office parties a surprise as we try to escape the virus.

If that were not enough worry, the use of pardons has become a troublesome political issue without a ready solution. And the major entry of business into space has created a whole new area for misadventure.

In short, crime is a growth industry. So we can expect as usual that the issues presented in these pages will handsomely test our notions of morality and ethics, as well as uses of technology. Misadventure and its consequences are firmly in the saddle.

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