

20 years on

Enver Solomon introduces this issue of **cjm**.

It is two decades since the first issue of cjm rolled off the printing press. A cursory look back over the last 20 years and any number of themes or trends that have dominated the crime and social policy discourse could be identified. Indeed recent issues of cjm have tackled some of them, such as the increasing criminalisation of people and places; the emergence of a surveillance society; a renewed focus on early intervention and the global trend towards greater use of detention. Yet there is one less obvious but nevertheless prominent theme of the last 20 years – the impact and influence of perspectives, policies and practices from North America.

All too often politicians and their advisers have flown across the Atlantic in search of solutions to the most pressing crime problems of the day. So it is not too difficult to come up with a list of initiatives that began in different parts of North America – offender behaviour programmes for prisoners; zero tolerance policing and the broken windows theory of maintaining social order; drug courts; community justice centres; gang disruption programmes – these are just some examples.

This twentieth anniversary issue of **cjm** focuses on North America in an attempt to critically consider some of the policies and practices that have emerged from that continent and the merits of policy transfer to the UK and Europe. Following the historic election of Barack Obama and recent political change in Canada the themed section also seeks to explore the changing criminal justice landscape in those countries with contributions from some of their most well known criminologists. Edited by **Dr Stephanie Hayman** of the University of Alberta and a former **cjm** editor, it provides a uniquely accessible overview of criminal justice developments in North America.

A glance through the first issue of **cjm** reveals that many of the issues vexing the minds of policy makers, practitioners, students and academics in spring 1989 were the same as today. Terrence Morris, a magistrate and professor of social institutions at the London School of Economics reflected on the business he dealt with in court noting that ‘the majority of those whom we shall see this morning will be poor, unemployed and relatively inarticulate. Their crimes will be predominantly those of theft. Small, mean, stupid thefts; thefts committed under the stress of poverty or the liberating effects of drink’. There was also a report on a speech at the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies AGM by the then Attorney General, Sir Patrick Mayhew, in which he called for active measures to be taken to improve the confidence of

magistrates and judges in ‘probation and community service orders’.

Any magistrate today would most probably make very similar observations, and the Justice Secretary Jack Straw has recently called for the very same measures as Sir Patrick did 20 years ago. This continuity in the crime and social policy discourses is reflected in the topical issues section of this issue. **Jonathan Jackson, Emily Gray** and **Stephen Farrall** untangle the long-standing subject of the fear of crime. Reporting on recent research findings they attempt to shed light on the complex question of why crime and ‘fear of crime’ has ‘come to shape and structure how we make sense of our social world and how we experience many aspects of our social world’.

The ever-increasing prison population in the UK remains a central preoccupation for all those concerned with imprisonment trends. In Scotland, however, there has been a more radical rethink than in England and Wales with a Commission on Prisons proposing measures to substantially cut the numbers locked up. **Sarah Armstrong** and **Fergus McNeil**, who were involved in the Commission’s work, argue that the report radically changes the way punishment is talked about and acted on in Scotland.

Three more contemporary policy reforms that would not have appeared in the pages of **cjm** 20 years ago are also critically appraised in this issue. **Rod Morgan** examines the use of out-of-court summary powers, which he argues have resulted in extensive net-widening with individuals being drawn into the criminal justice system who previously were ignored or dealt with informally. **Caroline Hunter** and **Judy Nixon** examine the experiences of anti-social behaviour measures for women, addressing a gap in the literature on anti-social behaviour that has thus far largely failed to consider the importance and consequences of gender. Finally, **Barry Loveday** considers the government’s latest proposals to make the police more accountable through directly elected police authorities.

When **cjm** came into being, its aim, as set out in the first editorial (reprinted in this issue), was to provide ‘a readable and novel magazine for all those concerned about crime’ and ‘digestible information’ about what is happening in the many parts of the criminal justice system. Two decades on we hope **cjm** is not only fulfilling its original mission but also providing the very best in accessible critical writing on crime and social policy for a global audience. ■

Enver Solomon, editor for this issue, is Deputy Director at the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies.
