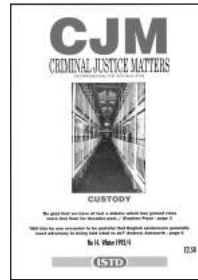


Jamie Bennett, Joe Sim, Peter Squires, Robert Reiner and Barry Loveday offer their own recollections of a stand out subject from the past 26 years



Jamie Bennett – Rex Bloomstein's films of reflection and empathy

Through his documentaries, Rex Bloomstein has charted the experience of imprisonment over the last 40 years. His films are carefully constructed, often drawing upon observational material harvested over long periods of time, and featuring extended interviews, sometimes revisiting people over many years.

His early films, such as *The Sentence* (1976) and *Parole* (1979), focused on the criminal justice process, showing the viewer how critical decisions were made and exposing them to interviews with people subject to those decisions. This approach puts the viewer in the uncomfortable position of becoming a participant-observer, experiencing the complexity and enormity of the everyday judicial decisions. His films *Release* (1976) and *Prisoners' Wives* (1977) cast light upon the experiences of those leaving prison and those left behind when someone is sent to prison.

His most well known series, the eight-part *Strangeways* (1980), was an intimate study of HMP Manchester that remains one of the most important films to be made about a prison. Its detailed, almost ethnographic, attention to this prison revealed the dynamics of everyday life. The film received two BAFTA awards and was cited by a future Director General of the Prison Service, Martin Narey, as an influence on his decision to work in prisons. In 1983, he made *Lifer*, focussing on the life sentence process and the diverse people serving that sentence. The interviews filmed for this were also developed into a seven part series, *Lifers* (1984).

In 2000, Bloomstein made *Strangeways Revisited*, in which he returned to the prison he had documented 20 years

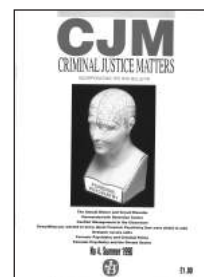
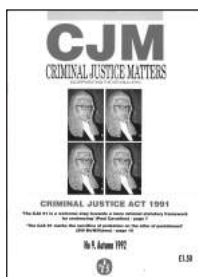
before. This film looked at how the prison and its population had changed in the intervening years, a period which included the devastating 25-day riot in April 1990. He also interviewed several of those who he met in his original films, documenting their subsequent lives. This approach was repeated in *Lifer: Living With Murder* (2003) a follow-up to *Lifer* and *Lifers*, in which he met with several people featured in those films. Their lives had panned out in varied ways and some had rebuilt their lives, whilst others had remained entangled in the criminal justice or mental health systems.

His most recent contributions have looked at two ends of the age spectrum. *Kids Behind Bars* (2005) featured children in custody including local authority secure homes and young offender prisons. This was followed by his Sony award-winning radio documentary *Dying inside* (2012) which looked at the experience of older prisoners, the fastest growing group in prison, many of whom faced ending their lives in custody.

Bloomstein's contribution has been to maintain a space in popular culture for more measured reflection and empathy. The polemics and stereotypes, that so often characterise public discourse about crime and punishment, fall away as the viewer is exposed to a fuller expression of human experiences. Watching his films can be an uncomfortable and unsettling experience as they undermine those simplicities.

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Joe Sim – Strangeways: twenty-five years on

Lasting 25 days, the demonstration at Strangeways prison in Manchester, in April 1990, remains the longest, and most seismic disturbance in British prison history. The demonstration came on the back of a series of interlocking crises that had gripped the prison system throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In February 1991, Lord Justice Woolf, at that point a Lord Justice of Appeal, published his analysis of the disturbance to wide acclaim, at least within liberal prison reform and media circles. The report was less welcomed by John Major's Conservative government, who on the day of publication had begun the process of undermining Woolf's liberal proposals. It was also less welcomed, although for very different reasons, by those who had adopted a more critical position regarding the place of the prison in brutalising prisoners, and the institution's wider role in reproducing an inequitable social order.

Twenty-five years on

Events since 1990 have demonstrated, and continue to demonstrate, the limitations of Woolf's liberal analysis in the context of a beleaguered prison system, whose everyday existence in the second decade of the twenty-first century continues to be beset by systemic crises and whose very legitimacy remains seriously contested. The prison (and the increasing number of brutalising, public and private, satellite institutions that have emerged since 1990), remains a place for the delivery of punishment and pain for the dispossessed and powerless. Self-inflicted deaths, and incidents of self-harm, issues consistently highlighted by INQUEST, provide chilling examples of how penal power impacts on the confined on the ground. For them, penal institutions are not simply places of fear, loathing and brutality but are experienced as places of psychic terror. These institutions are their nemesis. They place all prisoners 'at risk', not just the vulnerable few on whom so much of the policy debate has focussed.

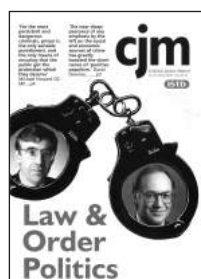
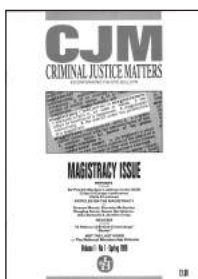
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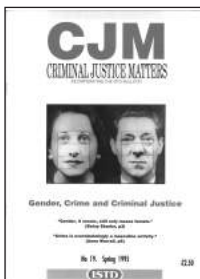
Successive Home Secretaries, Ministers of Justice, fly-by-night Ministers of State (three since 2010 alone) and prison reform organisations, remain fixated on a penal policy built

around a series of regressive, binary divides: private prisons vs. state prisons, overcrowding vs. alternatives to custody, increasing expenditure vs. cutbacks. In reality, these classifications fail lamentably to address the fundamental issues confronting the prison system which, as Michel Foucault pointed out four decades ago, have been central to the prison crisis since the institution's birth at the end of the eighteenth century. The stultifying reformist agenda, as exemplified in the Woolf Report, has been the dominant discourse since that time with baleful outcomes.

Foucault's point suggests that the prison crisis is also a crisis of liberalism in that this discourse offers very little beyond the endless, debilitating cycle of crisis-reform-crisis. Ultimately, this lugubrious, entrenched mind-set does little to rehabilitate those few lawbreakers who are actually caught and processed by the criminal justice system. Additionally, it does little to protect the wider public (especially women) from conventional crime or from the desperate social harms and corrosive transgressions committed by the powerful. In these soul-crunching times, there is a need to shift away from the philistine policies currently being pursued and to confront what Henry Giroux calls the 'disimagination machine', which is central to the state's construction of a common sense law and order mentality. Instead, a radical, redemptive and ultimately abolitionist position on prisons, and criminal justice more generally, needs to be developed. Idealistic and utopian though this might seem, at least to those who support reducing the politics of prisons to banal sound bites or to those who are profiting from the privatisation agenda, anything less at this moment will only reinforce the current crisis inside. Perhaps, it might also generate another Strangeways with catastrophic consequences for prisoners and staff.

Joe Sim is Professor of Criminology, Liverpool John Moores University





Peter Squires - From Dunblane to Duggan: the rise and fall of British gun crime?

March 2016 will mark the twentieth anniversary of the shooting massacre at Dunblane Primary School, when 16 five-year old children and their teacher were killed, by a lone gunman carrying four (licensed) handguns. The two decades since frame an important chapter in the evolving story of gun crime in Britain. Superficially, it may appear a simple story of rise and fall, problem and response, but looked at more closely it is rather less simple, and it may not yet be concluded.

The story begins before 1996: gun enabled crime had been steadily rising since the 1960s, although Michael Ryan's August 1987 shooting spree through the town of Hungerford, (31 people were shot, 16 fatally) marked a key turning point. The media focused on his legal possession of a Chinese model AK47 semi-automatic assault rifle, and government went on to prohibit semi-auto rifles and shotguns (though not handguns, with which Ryan also killed). A Firearms Consultative Committee, dominated by shooting interests, was established to advise the Home Office – but 'safer shooting' rather than 'gun control' was envisaged. Hungerford also gave the green light to the generalised adoption of 'armed response units' by police forces.

After Dunblane, Lord Cullen's carefully crafted inquiry proposals were overwhelmed by public outrage and, between them, the outgoing Conservative government and incoming New Labour, prohibited all handguns. Banning lower calibre handguns became part of Blair's capture of the 'law and order' issue; elite sports shooting interests breathed a sigh of relief, having avoided tougher controls. The gun problem now settled on the urban hand-gunner – legal and illegal - rather than 'field sports', which survived yet another Select Committee scrutiny (the 3rd) following Derrick Bird's killing spree in Cumbria in 2010.

In fact, the urban gun crime problem was changing shape; urban gang cultures generated a demand for cheap handguns and new sources of supply became available including: converted weapons, air weapons, reactivated weapons, imitation weapons, antiques and BB guns. These supplies of 'junk guns' to inner city gangs – a form of weapon displacement - helped inflate recorded gun crime figures (an 105% increase 1998 – 2003/2004 to a peak of around 11,000 offences (excluding air weapons) or 0.3% of recorded crime) even after the handgun ban had made factory quality weapons relatively harder to come by. New

legislation, effective intelligence and proactive policing were still playing catch up.

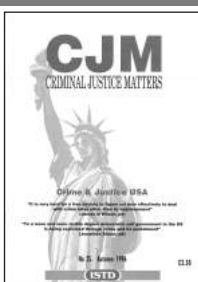
A drive-by gang shooting in Birmingham in which two young women were killed, led to tougher mandatory sentences and a series of high profile policy summits focussing upon gang-related gun crime. In London, the MPS Operation Trident began to target 'black on black' gun crime. But after 2004-2005 recorded gun crime began to fall. In part this was due to sections 37-9 of the *Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003* which reclassified misuse of air and imitation weapons in a public place as 'ASB offences' rather than 'gun crimes'. Subsequently new restrictions on air weapons, realistic imitations and progressive controls on 'readily convertible' firearms (*Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006*) have closed further loopholes.

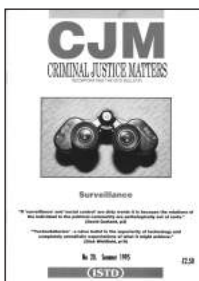
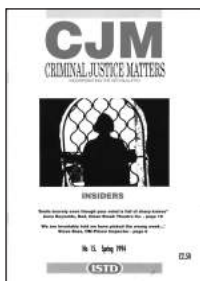
Vitaly important in containing demand for illegal firearms have been anti-gang, intelligence-led, policing initiatives in a number of major conurbations, aided by the introduction, from 2008, of the National Ballistics Intelligence Service (NABIS) which maintains a live database on criminally active firearms (drawn from trace evidence, cartridge cases, crime scenes and intelligence reports). NABIS is a major resource for tracing illegal firearm use and supply both into and across the country. With recorded gun crime in England and Wales falling almost 50% throughout the past decade (3,000 firearm offences – excluding air weapons – in 2012-2013), NABIS spokesmen are reporting less than 1,300 criminally active firearms. In the wake of the Paris shootings it was reassuring to see so few AK47s, favourite of terrorists, amongst these. So far.

One might hope that falling gun crime – anti-terror preparations notwithstanding - would ease the pressure for more police armed deployments, except that police arming reflects other pressures (witness the single-crewing, police morale issues wrapped up in the recent Police Federation demand for Tasers). Police deploy firearms often but shoot very seldom, although when they do, as the recent cases of Jean Charles de Menezes, Azelle Rodney and Mark Duggan in their own ways reveal, they trigger a major crises for law and order, and for trust and confidence for the police.

Peter Squires is Professor of Criminology and Public Policy, University of Brighton

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Robert Reiner - Do the powerful still need the police?

The Conservative-led coalition government's policing policies embody a profound rupture in the politics of policing. The Conservatives have been tougher on the police in the name of 'austerity' than any 'old' Labour government would ever have dared to be.

The government claims its cuts do not threaten public safety because they are accompanied by fundamental reforms incentivising the police to produce more from less. But the coalition package amounts to a dramatic weakening of police power, autonomy, pay, and conditions of service. Why has this happened at the hands of the Tory Party, formerly the avid paramour of the police, and why now?

The programme, self-billed as 'the most radical change to policing in 50 years', is not proposed because of a law and order crisis. Crime has been falling for two decades, and there isn't even a hint in the government's statements of any special emergency. In one sense so revolutionary a package is happening under the Tories because it could only happen under the Tories. If a Labour government had attempted anything as radical it would have been attacked as soft on crime but tough on the police, charges that would have been hugely electorally damaging.

But this still leaves a big question. What has happened to the cultural capital of the police? Why do the cries of police spokespersons that cutting cops is Christmas for crooks no longer carry the clout they used to?

Most official and media commentary suggest the political power of the police has been weakened by police own goals, from Orgreave and Hillsborough in the 1980s, to Plebgate. However, such malpractices were prevalent when the police occupied a pedestal in public opinion. So the question remains, why have the police plunged in political clout sufficiently to allow the deep transformation in their resources and powers?

At one level the cut backs on police are congruent with the larger neo-libertarian Tory agenda of trimming state expenditure. In the Thatcher era the police were treated as a special case, pivotal in bringing to heel trade unionism, especially during the 1984-1985 Miners' Strike, and

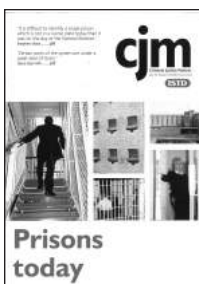
combating the urban disorders resulting from the unemployment and deprivation generated by monetarist economic policies. However, in the 1990s politically edged public disorder receded. In addition, for reasons that remain debated, recorded crime began a sustained fall (throughout the Western world). The part played by policing in the crime drop is questionable, but it has taken pressure off the remorseless demand for more police.

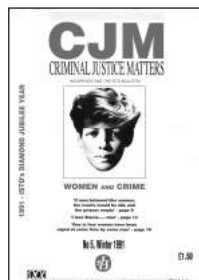
The fundamental source of the transformation of the policing landscape, however, lies in deeper change in the political economy and culture of British society: the embedding of the hegemony of neo-liberal free market economics and a culture of narcissistic individualism. The key link between neo-liberal political economy and policing is the return of massively greater inequality. The rise of the publicly provided police in the early nineteenth century was part of a modernist project of constructing a broadly universal order, and a common status of citizenship in which all shared, albeit unequally. It is significant that the creation of the modern police was opposed not only by the working class, who were not yet incorporated into citizenship, but also by the aristocracy and gentry who saw state policing as an unnecessary expense, as they were protected by physical segregation and private retainers. Analysts of the growth of private security have long seen this as a return to pre-modern policing forms, a 'new feudalism' in which the privileged float free, cocooned from the masses in security bubbles.

The bottom line politically permitting the Conservative police reforms is that the powerful are simply less dependent on public police protection, benefiting from bespoke services. Conservative theorists have long argued that only a 'night watchman' state can be justified as a call on taxation. But this overlooks the degree of redistribution represented by publicly financed policing. In the present conjuncture the police are being rolled back with the rest of the state, and privatisation – with no mandate for the public good – flourishes.

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Barry Loveday - Labour's election proposals for the police service: taking the wrong road

Last week the Shadow Home Secretary and Policing Minister, Yvette Cooper, unveiled Labour's plans for criminal justice and policing. While a number of these are to be welcomed, it is evident that for the police service the plans outlined by Labour represent a major step backwards. If implemented they would return England and Wales to a failed system of limited accountability of police that pertained prior to arrival of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs). It would effectively re-establish a professional monopoly of 'local' police governance by chief officers. Not that planned police forces would be that local, of course. This reform would also see the creation of large regional police forces led by a much reduced number of chief officers.

This proposal has been a long term goal of ACPO (and HMIC) and would end local policing as we know it. It would also establish distant police bureaucracies subject to only limited accountability by indirectly elected councillors. This, of course, it based on earlier proposals laid out in the 'independent' Stevens Report on Policing which placed a professional policing model at the centre of any desired reform. In reality, the Shadow Opposition appears to have surrendered entirely to the police lobby which, as expected, has lined up against both the current police force structure and, of course, the new PCCs.

PCCs, not surprisingly, are clear targets for senior officers as they have very effectively rebalanced responsibility and control of the police away from the professionals and towards the public. Just how necessary this reform might be judged to be is now being played out on a daily basis with the current inquiry into the Hillsborough disaster (and subsequent police cover-up). However what is most striking about the performance of PCCs to date, is how effective Labour PCCs have proved to be.

This has been most recently highlighted in a recent Fabian publication, edited by Vera Baird, PCC for Northumbria. In *Letting in the Light: Lessons from Labour's Police and Crime Commissioners*, the Labour PCCs outline what they have been able to achieve since taking office. As several were former members of police authorities, they have also flagged up just how much more effective the PCC role has proven to be, and the contrast this provides to what went before.

It is also of interest to note that the evident discomfort of some Chief Officers has reflected the decision of PCCs to use their powers within the *Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011*, and not to back down when confronting intransigent senior police managers. As in Avon and Somerset, Gwent and most recently Northumbria, the old power position of the Chief Constable has been successfully challenged and arguably, not before time. It is too early to rush to judgement, but the PCC experiment has served to highlight the need, long overdue, to subject police forces to more effective scrutiny and oversight.

There is of course room for further change. As the House of Lords Committee on Standards in Public Life is likely to recommend, there is a palpable need to make PCCs more accountable to local communities between PCC elections. This could be achieved by giving local Police and Crime Panels (PCPs) more scrutiny powers over both the PCC and Chief Constable. Currently the PCPs are the weakest link in the chain and their future role would benefit from enhancing their status and powers. This would offer a much more attractive (and far less expensive) option to those on offer from Labour. Sadly this party appears to be committed, not to the future, but rather to returning to the very questionable police-dominated structures that so evidently failed us all in the past.

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