

Annual Review of Criminology
**Renewing Historical
Criminology: Scope,
Significance, and Future
Directions**

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Annu. Rev. Criminol. 2023. 6:339–61

First published as a Review in Advance on
July 29, 2022

The *Annual Review of Criminology* is online at
criminol.annualreviews.org

<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-criminol-030421-035516>

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Keywords

historical criminology, historical time, criminal justice history, interdisciplinarity

Abstract

Recent years have seen increasing interest in, and scholarly discussion of, historical criminology. Yet there remains at present no clear, settled view as to what historical criminology entails, how it is best pursued, and what its future might hold. This article explores the several conceptions of historical criminology found in the present literature, which associate it variously with archival research, practical inquiry, a concern with temporality, and a certain approach to interdisciplinary scholarship. Adopting the view that historical criminology entails a special regard for historical time, the review goes on to assess its significance to the wider field, examining its connection with some of the core impulses of criminology at large. Finally, it suggests some major opportunities for historical criminology to contribute to the future development of criminology, including through an inclusive global criminology, a criminology of events, and research on crime and justice futures.

INTRODUCTION

These are exciting times for historical criminology. Recent years have witnessed a growing interest in what historical criminology might be, what it might entail, and how it might contribute to criminology at large. To be clear, historical research in criminology is nothing new. Historical perspectives of one kind or another have been notable within criminological research since its formation. There are also long traditions of rich and rewarding historical scholarship on crime and related matters issuing from other disciplines. The present moment, then, is not marked by the emergence of historical perspectives in criminology; rather, it seems to presage a new phase of reflection upon, and refinement of, such perspectives. Every so often, it seems, criminology enjoys a phase of sustained, critical reflection on the nature and purposes of historical research. One such phase occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as new directions in critical criminology came into dialogue with social histories of crime and law (see, e.g., Cohen & Scull 1983, Fitzgerald et al. 1981). Another perhaps occurred in the 1980s and 1990s, as criminologists and sociolegal scholars began their engagement with Michel Foucault's "histories of the present" and directed similar inquiries to their own concerns (see, e.g., Garland 1985, Hunt 1999, Pratt 1997, Valverde 1998). The present moment may be the latest phase of serious, self-conscious attention to, and concern with, basic theoretical and methodological questions concerning historical research on crime, criminal justice, and crime control. This most recent discussion has often proceeded under the banner of "historical criminology."

Increasing resort to the phrase historical criminology in this context differs from other meanings it has assumed over the years. Perhaps the first considered, purposeful usage came (in German) in the subtitle of Gustav Radbruch and Heinrich Gwinner's major study (Radbruch & Gwinner 1951), which aimed to show the historicity of criminality by comparing criminal formations of different eras (see Catello 2019, pp. 201–52).¹ Here, as in much of the older Anglophone literature, there is considerable overlap between the terms historical criminology and history of crime (see also, e.g., Middendorff 1973). Alternatively, historical criminology was once often used to refer to the history of criminological thought (e.g., Geis & Goff 1986; Lindesmith & Levin 1937, p. 654). The phrase also appeared in the earlier phases of criminological engagement with historical research noted above, often as a means of denoting historical research relevant to criminological concerns conducted across disciplines or scholarly traditions (e.g., Carlen 1980, pp. 13–15). Recently, though, the phrase has become somewhat commonplace. Networks bearing its name have sprung up in several parts of the world under the auspices of major scholarly societies in criminology (see Yeomans et al. 2020, p. 245) and the phrase has increasingly appeared in published work. Moreover, historical criminology has been adopted and advanced in a small but swelling tide of studies that seek to directly address the nature and purposes of historical research in criminology. It is these studies—and the basic questions that motivate them—that form the principal focus of this article.

In what follows, we critically assess major recent contributions to scholarship on historical criminology and elaborate on some implications of this scholarship for criminology at large. The article is structured around three core questions. The first section explores questions of scope: What is historical criminology, and how might we best think about and practice historical research in criminology? This section surveys the range of responses that have been given to such questions in recent years and the connections they draw between historical criminology and archival methods, practical inquiry, temporality, and interdisciplinarity. Ultimately embracing the view that associates historical criminology with historical time, the article goes on to explore its implications

¹Regrettably, our linguistic competence restricts the present review to works published in English.

for criminology at large. The second section addresses the significance of historical criminology for the wider field. Specifically, it explores what a concern for historical time has to contribute to four core impulses of criminological work—the critical, reforming, redemptive, and public impulses. The third and final section of the article turns to future directions for historical criminology. Rather than attempting to itemize specific research problems and topics, it outlines three broad areas of criminological understanding to which a concern for historical time has much to contribute: eventful analysis of crime and control, a global criminology, and research on crime and justice futures.

SCOPE: WHAT IS HISTORICAL CRIMINOLOGY?

In current scholarship, historical criminology tends to refer to the idea of an interdisciplinary synthesis of criminology and history, or, more exactly, of sociological studies in criminology and criminal justice history. For some years, scholars have pondered (typically with regret) the failure of criminologists and historians to establish a sustained and productive dialogue across disciplinary divides (see Bleakley & Kehoe 2021, Lawrence 2012, Pratt 1996, Yeomans et al. 2020). Discussions of historical criminology have accompanied claims for the increasing convergence of criminology and history (Godfrey et al. 2008, pp. 19–22), and works that aim to straddle the two fields—notably long-term analyses of contemporary crime and control and works that apply criminological theory to historical source materials—increasingly style themselves as studies in historical criminology (e.g., Lawrence 2017, Nagy & Rychner 2021, Vuorela 2018). Such works disclose the kind of interdisciplinary fusion desired from historical criminology: a form of historical inquiry into crime and related matters attuned at least as closely to the preoccupations of criminology as an academic field as to those of history. Scholars have long noted that criminal justice historians tend “*not* to address the present. . . but to uncover the past” (Pratt 1996, p. 62; emphasis in original) and prefer to avoid direct claims regarding the relevance or contribution of their research to current issues (Lawrence 2012, p. 321). Historical criminology, then, gestures to a species of historical research oriented to understanding the present as much as the past and to changing criminal justice as much as understanding it (see Knepper & Scicluna 2010, p. 408). Recently, though, several more specific conceptions of historical criminology have emerged, each of them an attempt to overcome or otherwise resolve difficulties in the interdisciplinary understanding between history and criminology and each offering a subtly different impression of the identity and intent of historical criminology.

For some, the essence of historical criminology lies in the appropriation, by and for criminology, of methodological techniques and approaches usually associated with the discipline of history. This tends to identify historical criminology closely with archival research.² Thus, in an early work to address historical criminology explicitly and at length, Mary Bosworth (2001b) examined methodological issues arising from her own research using French archives concerning women’s imprisonment.³ Subsequently, Paul Knepper (2014, p. 2084) drew the connection between historical criminology and archival research most clearly: “historical criminology,” he writes, “relies on primary sources, documents, and materials that originate in the time period of interest.” As distinct from “theory-driven research,” historical criminology, for Knepper, works primarily from empirical materials—it concerns concrete times and places rather than abstract generalities (see also Bosworth 2001b). Thus, historical criminology is distinguished by a particular method.

²By contrast, Mathieu Deflem (2015) associates historical criminology specifically with comparative historical research methods.

³For further discussion of archival research practices in criminology, see Godfrey (2012) and Seal & Neale (2021).

Extending this basic claim, Thomas Guiney (2020) outlined the weightier methodological and epistemological implications that flow from it. The “inherent temporality” of historical research, he suggests, predisposes historical criminologists toward agent-centered accounts rich in “descriptive complexity,” and hence toward the “empirical particulars” of the archive (Guiney 2020, p. 80). This “grounded historical sociology of crime demands a more practical and iterative research craft that is closer in spirit to that taken by historians than by social scientists” (Guiney 2020, p. 82). Thus, for the likes of Knepper and Guiney, historical criminology conforms more closely to the conventions of historiography than the long-term, analytical histories sometimes favored by criminologists (see also Bosworth 2001b, Loader & Sparks 2004; compare with Garland 2001, p. 2).

By contrast, some concerned with historical criminology seek not to adopt the methodological presumptions of historians but rather to cast them aside. The most significant body of scholarship in this respect is concerned with genealogies of crime and punishment. Inspired by Foucault (1991, 1984), such studies have claimed to use historical inquiry less to understand the past than to problematize and critically reevaluate present-day arrangements. Whereas conventional historiography tends to involve inquiry into specific past times and places, aiming to understand the past on its own terms, genealogy starts from particular institutions or practices in the present and investigates their contested and contingent lines of historical descent. As David Garland (2014, p. 372) explains: “Genealogical analysis traces how contemporary practices and institutions emerged out of specific struggles, conflicts, alliances, and exercises of power, many of which are nowadays forgotten.” Genealogy thus seems to offer an approach that breaks free from the constraints of conventional historiography—a history of the present in place of a history of the past (see Braithwaite 2003, pp. 8–9)—and hence a mode of historical inquiry fit for the practical and political purposes of criminology (Garland 2014, Pratt 1996). Expanding upon this genealogical inheritance, Roberto Catello (2019, 2021) has argued at length that historical criminology as such should be understood somewhat similarly—as a field of inquiry that mobilizes historical materials to address questions concerning contemporary crime and justice. He sees historical criminology as a domain of practical inquiry, interrogating what ought to be done about criminal justice in the present and future. It is concerned not just with the “historical past” of facts concerning situations and events but also with the “practical past”—that of the past that is needful as a guide for action and a basis for judgment (Catello 2019, pp. 287–88; see also White 2014, pp. viii–xiv). Seen as such, historical criminology is a rather neglected field of research, stifled by the historicist outlook and intent that pervades historical scholarship on crime and justice (Catello 2019, 2021). To flourish, historical criminology must liberate itself from historicism and seek out fresh insights to guide action in the here and now.

For others, historical criminology gestures toward an intellectual space in which the basic presumptions of both history and criminology are critically reexamined. Specifically, attention has focused on how rethinking the relation between past and present might offer an alternative path to interdisciplinary insight. If different approaches to and uses of the past are what fundamentally divide the two fields (Lawrence 2012), then closer integration might come through reworking commonplace understandings of past and present across criminology and history. David Churchill (2017) suggested that cultivating diverse temporalities of inquiry—including long-term histories, historical comparisons, and memory and future studies—has the potential to forge interdisciplinary dialogue from outside the rather stereotyped understandings of history and the past that have hindered previous exchanges. Paul Lawrence has argued that long-term, explanatory histories in particular offer a fruitful avenue for developing the contemporary relevance and practical import of historical criminology. Long-term histories, he argues, provide an opportunity for “data from and about the past—‘history’—[to] explain and serve as a guide to action in the

present” (Lawrence 2019, p. 494). Closer inquiry into the phasing and extent of continuity and change in crime and justice, across extended periods of time, would, Lawrence suggests, allow for more assertive and convincing uses of historical data in explaining current responses to crime and intervening in policy and practice.

Finally, for others still, historical criminology demands no fundamental rethinking of basic scholarly approach, whether in terms of temporality, the purposes of research, or its methodology. Rather, as Bleakley & Kehoe (2021) argue, a more modest conception of historical criminology as a spectrum of approaches spanning mainstream sociological criminology on the one hand and traditional criminal justice history on the other might yield rich interdisciplinary insight (see also Flaatten & Ystehede 2014, pp. 136–37). They suggest that the dissonances in interdisciplinary exchange between historians and criminologists have been, to a considerable extent, self-imposed through a certain disciplinary and methodological defensiveness on both sides: An “inordinate focus on the subtle distinctions and points of tension” between the two fields “fundamentally ignores the far greater fusion between the disciplines that is already occurring” (Bleakley & Kehoe 2021, p. 135). The identity of historical criminology arises not from rumination on questions of temporal orientation or methodological approach, they argue, but rather from an acceptance of the “methodological incompleteness and ambiguity” intrinsic to interdisciplinary scholarship (Bleakley & Kehoe 2021, p. 137). Thus conceived, historical criminology entails purposely not taking a certain line on questions of temporality or methodology but instead consciously accepting a degree of diversity, eclecticism, and experimentation in response to such questions.

The foregoing discussion makes clear the polyphonous quality of recent scholarship on historical criminology. There is no settled view as to how historical criminology should be conceived and pursued. Each of the perspectives discussed above issues from a particular position with respect to the interdisciplinary relation between history and criminology, and each discloses a distinct view of the appropriate path forward for historical research in criminology. The various possible directions for historical criminology are clearly to some degree mutually exclusive: whether to embrace historians’ methods or to reject their basic tenets; whether to fundamentally rethink history and the past or to revel in ambiguity. Moreover, each view faces certain difficulties in its conception of criminology and the historical. To identify historical criminology closely with archival research risks conflating the historical with the archival. Although proficiency in archival, documentary research has long been integral to historians’ professional standing and esteem, such a view perhaps misrepresents contemporary historical research practice, much of which proceeds from published documents, images, quantitative data sets, oral testimony, material artifacts, and other kinds of sources. It seems inappropriate to ground historical criminology in a narrower understanding of the historical than that embodied in the discipline of history.⁴ The notion of historical criminology as a practical inquiry into the present also faces certain problems. Dramatizing the contrast between genealogy and historiography tends to exaggerate it: More conventional histories can also shine important light on present concerns, including in ways likely to elude genealogists, with potentially significant implications for policy and public understanding (Bosworth 2001b, Braithwaite 2003, Cox 2012, Dixon 1996, Knepper & Scicluna 2010). Furthermore, styling historical criminology as an inquiry into the present seems to limit the scope of criminology at large. If inquiry into crime and justice in other times, in their specific historical contexts, lies beyond the bounds even of historical criminology, then the temporal horizons of criminology seem thereby sharply limited. This may align with the contemporary orientation and focus of much

⁴Knepper (2019) himself has more recently considered integrating other forms of trace evidence—which go far beyond the kinds of material historians tend to work on—into an expanded “historical science” in criminology.

criminological scholarship (see Bursik 2009, Laub 2004, Rafter 2010, Rock 2005), yet it seems to evacuate the possibility of criminology as a science of crime and justice across times—past, present, and future. Other views similarly leave major questions open: If historical criminology demands that we rethink temporality, then how exactly are we to do that? If it calls for a new culture concerning the dissonances arising from interdisciplinary work, then how might we foster such a culture?

Recently, we as authors have sought to offer a way through these questions and dilemmas. Rather than reflecting further on the (now rather well-worn) question of the interdisciplinary relation between history and criminology, we have sought to offer an original characterization of historical criminology on its own terms. The result is a conception of historical criminology that differs in important respects from those found in the current literature (Churchill et al. 2022). Taking historical criminology to refer straightforwardly to historical scholarship on crime and related concerns, our work is founded upon a thoroughgoing reexamination of notions of the historical and historical inquiry. Rejecting understandings centered on the past or archival research methods—understandings that, explicitly or otherwise, inform the studies outlined above—we identify the historical with historical time, and hence historical criminology with criminological scholarship undertaken with regard to historical time. We suggest that historical time is a specific form of time, marked by five core aspects (Churchill et al. 2022, p. 6; emphasis in original):

First, historical time is a time of *change*—from subtle shifts and gradual developments to seismic breaks and radical transformations. Second, it is an *eventful* time—a time of happenings, of things taking place. Third, it is a time of *flow*—a time of movement, process and becoming. Fourth, it is a *tensed* time—it suggests relations to pasts, presents and futures. Fifth, it is an *embodied* time—a time embodied in things and a time to which things belong.

Understood in this way, historical criminology is less a point of interdisciplinary exchange or convergence than a broad family of approaches to criminology united by a close regard for the ways in which historical time intersects with its specific subject matter. This includes conventional histories of crime and justice that show (for example) how the nature and extent of criminal activity changed in specific historical contexts, or that discern broad periods characterizing the historical development of crime control. It also accommodates genealogical work that highlights (for example) the descent of particular techniques or conceptions of punishment down to the present. Yet criminological engagement with change, eventfulness, flow, tense, and temporal embodiment reaches far wider than this. Hence, historical criminology also encompasses traditions of longitudinal research that foreground the contingent, eventful character of criminal life courses and the scope for change in criminal careers (e.g., Laub & Sampson 1993). It includes the growing body of work on memory and injustice, including studies of denial in relation to difficult pasts (e.g., Cohen 2001) and how collective memory is subject to social control (e.g., Dudai 2018). It embraces too the diverse microanalyses of crime and deviance sponsored by symbolic interactionism, labeling theory, phenomenology, and allied approaches that seek to capture the social world in the flow of time or the processual character of social action and perception (e.g., Becker 1973, Katz 1988). There is much that differentiates these various bodies of work (and more), but they have in common, we claim, a serious engagement with historical time: They exhibit a concern and a regard for change, eventfulness, flow, tense, and temporal embodiment. And, in so doing, they offer something of value to the broad, disparate, collective project of understanding crime and criminal justice as historical phenomena that we term “historical criminology” (Churchill et al. 2022, pp. 7–14). Seen as such, historical criminology is not a specialist subdivision of criminology but one of a handful of basic approaches to it—along and overlapping with sociological, legal, psychological, and other approaches (Churchill et al. 2022, pp. 6–7).

To summarize, discussion of historical criminology in Anglophone scholarship has arisen primarily from an interest in questions of interdisciplinary alignment or convergence between sociological criminology and criminal justice history. Historical criminology has functioned as a byword for a kind of historical scholarship that might emerge from this interdisciplinary juncture. Several specific conceptions of historical criminology have emerged, focused variously on archival research methods, genealogy and other species of historical-practical inquiry, conceptualizations of history and the past, and a culture of interdisciplinary experimentation. Our own work, seeking to transcend questions of interdisciplinary alignment between history and criminology, has offered an integrative account of historical criminology as a basic approach to criminology constituted of diverse research traditions and approaches that manifest a regard for historical time. At present, each of these various portraits of historical criminology vies for attention, yet any reasonably succinct attempt to assess the significance and future opportunities for research in historical criminology must proceed from one of them in particular. Hence, the remainder of this article develops our own account of historical criminology as associated with historical time. We do so primarily because ours is a pluralistic account of historical criminology that recognizes the value of different kinds of scholarly engagement with the historical and that seeks to integrate several of the more specific approaches advanced by other contributors to this debate. As such, it offers an appropriately broad and inclusive basis from which to survey the field, assess its significance, and chart pathways for future research.

SIGNIFICANCE: WHAT IS HISTORICAL CRIMINOLOGY GOOD FOR?

This section aims to assess the significance and (potential) contribution of historical criminology to the field at large. We have already claimed that historical criminology is one of a handful of basic approaches to the study of crime—yet how exactly does it advance the core concerns of the wider field? We seek to address this question by examining how historical perspectives can advance four impulses that we consider integral to criminology: the critical impulse, the reforming impulse, the redemptive impulse, and the public impulse. We present these impulses not as a typology of criminological work—scholars often channel multiple impulses even in a single piece of work (see Ericson 2005)—but simply as some of the key motivations that drive criminologists across the wide spectrum of the field. We address them here to indicate the contribution that historical criminology has to make to these varied concerns.

The Critical Impulse

Perhaps the most elemental impulse behind the whole enterprise of academic science is critical inquiry. As Richard Ericson (2005, p. 366) put it, “critical enquiry is what scientists, indeed all academics, do as professionals, challenging assumptions, theories, methods, findings and implications of research.” In criminology, this often manifests as a deep-seated skepticism about common-sense views of crime or prevailing political opinion (Becker 1973, pp. 177–213; Loader & Sparks 2011). The labels, categories, claims, and preconceptions within prominent discourses on crime are not accepted at face value; instead, they are questioned and challenged or taken as prompts for investigation. This impulse also compels criminologists to critique criminology itself. In this sense, a healthy science is one in which the institutional apparatus of the discipline or subject area does not stymie intellectual curiosity (see Williams 2000), with the result that established forms of knowledge are under perpetual interrogation, continually being reaffirmed, revised, replaced, or amalgamated with other established or nascent knowledges (Becker 1973, pp. 177–213; Carlen 2011). Here, then, we do not refer narrowly to the subfield of critical criminology; rather, we refer to an impulse—to question, to challenge, to create—that is found across academic criminology.

This critical impulse is helpfully triggered and sustained through engagements with historical time. Other times are marked by difference, and history introduces us to a dizzying array of variance, ranging from subtle distinctions to “jarring counter-points” (Lawrence 2019, p. 495) with respect to our own time (see also Knepper & Scicluna 2010). Much historical research tends to defamiliarize the present, puncturing any sense that current social arrangements are normal or inevitable. For example, the widespread, largely legal availability of opiates and other drugs in many Western countries in the nineteenth century dissolves any sense that drugs are naturally or inherently a social problem; it implies instead that the whole concept of drugs is a social construct born of particular historical circumstances early in the twentieth century (see Berridge 2013, Seddon 2016; see also Ruggiero 2000, pp. 75–89). Equally, though, historical research reveals similarity through “surprising continuities” (Lawrence 2019, p. 495) in how contemporary behaviors, values, practices, and institutions have long historical lineages or striking antecedents. Thus, historical research sometimes skewers the perception that our time is unique. Research on juvenile delinquency from the eighteenth century onward, for instance, has implicitly or explicitly debunked contemporary moral panics or social anxieties that assume contemporary youth crime is worsening or unprecedented (see Cox 2012, Pearson 1983, Shore 2002). Hence, insights into both historical difference and similarity are helpfully disruptive. Furthermore, both tend to undermine any sense that historical development is serene and normative (whether as progress or regress) (Lawrence 2019) and to unsettle epochalist views of the present as divorced from the past by a point of profound rupture (see Churchill 2019, Dodsworth 2015). Both historical difference and similarity also demand explanation. Studies of historical trends in homicide, for example, have instigated lively, theoretically incisive debates about why homicide has generally declined in Western societies since the medieval period (see Eisner 2001, Roth 2009, Spierenburg 2001). As such, historical difference and similarity offer a powerful stimulus for the critical impulse.

Moreover, historical perspective is crucial—perhaps essential—to the pursuit of critical perspectives on criminology itself. Without this, criminology can exhibit “presentism” (Yeomans 2019, p. 457) or “collective amnesia” (Laub 2004, p. 2), fixating on contemporary developments and forgetting its own past (see also Bursik 2009, Dooley 2016, Rafter 2010), with the result that various criminological wheels are periodically reinvented (Carlen 2011, Rock 2005). Developing, accumulating, reassembling, or overhauling knowledge requires comprehension of the theories, concepts, and methods that are dominant, how they emerged through time, and what preceded them (see Mooney 2020). For Nicole Rafter (2010), the history of criminology is also fundamental to its identity and capacity for reflection. Without a sense of where it has come from, she argues, we struggle to grasp what criminology is or to envisage its future. This history is partly documentary, working from the corpus of criminological literature, but also partly oral, working from the life stories of its practitioners, as reflected in the oral history projects of the American Society of Criminology (see Dooley 2016) and the European Society of Criminology (2011). Such efforts to foster criminology’s institutional memory help institutionalize the critical impulse and promise unique advances in criminological (self-)knowledge.

The Reforming Impulse

Of course, criminologists collectively seek not just to know the world but also to change it. Hence, criminology cultivates a reforming impulse that impels scholars to “engage with, and be taken seriously in, the world of practical affairs” (Loader & Sparks 2011, p. 6). Such engagement can take a variety of forms, including presenting scientific evidence to policy makers, cooperating with practitioners and other stakeholders in criminal justice, and working with pressure groups or social movements pressing for more sweeping change (see McAra 2016). Of course, engaging politically in criminal justice is a fraught and potentially compromising enterprise, potentially implicating

criminologists in unjust agendas and partial uses of research evidence (Hope & Walters 2008, Wacquant 2011). Yet, shorn of some such reforming purpose, there is clearly a danger of criminology developing into a private enterprise in which scholars indulge in communicating mostly with each other (Wiles 2002). The question for the present article, then, is what engagements with historical time have to add to criminology's reforming impulse.

At one level, the centrality of change to historical research presents challenges for engaging with reform initiatives. Taking historical difference seriously means recognizing that one cannot simply translate policies or practices from other times to present contexts. History does not repeat itself exactly (see also Catello 2021). Still, meaningful comparisons across time can sometimes inform thinking about present issues and policy reform (Thane 2009). Pamela Cox (2013) argues that her engagement with policy reform in both child protection in England and youth custody in Vietnam necessitated a historical understanding of present issues. Her finding that the trajectory of youth justice in Vietnam followed a similar pattern to historical developments in Western states led her to use evidence of past failings to argue that reform proposals in Vietnam required significant modification. Even when changes in historical contexts thwart any prospect of specifying particular policy interventions, historical examples might nevertheless raise broader insights for policy. For example, Pamela Cox & Barry Godfrey's (2020) analysis of the "great decarceration" in youth custody in England and Wales between the 1880s and 1940s highlighted the contribution of several "positive" penological practices (such as child removal; Cox & Godfrey 2020, p. 263) that are rightly considered harmful today. Yet they propose that the regard for education and positive relationships (that they argue typified reformatory and industrial schools of the period) might also be cultivated in contemporary community settings, thus drawing inspiration from past processes of decarceration for youth justice reform. This ability to combine synchronic (in-time) and diachronic (across-times) perspectives can help criminologists overcome the presentist frame of much policy discourse and identify neglected currents or inheritances in the flows of historical time into the present. Such historical reflexivity allows criminologists to not only connect past and present but also contribute to shaping preferable futures for criminal justice (see also Knepper 2014, 2016).

Besides harnessing insights from historical difference, the concern for eventfulness and tense in historical criminology has much to illuminate about the nature of reform itself. Reform can be understood as a sequence of events, bound together by interrelations of causation, consequence, and meaning. As such, a broadly historical approach—attuned to the eventful and contingent manner of agents interacting in specific circumstances—is critical to making sense of how reform unfolds in criminal justice (e.g., Guiney 2018, Rock 2004, Rubin 2015) as well as to understanding how some aspects of criminal justice seem impervious to reform (e.g., Rubin & Reiter 2018). Making sense of reform also necessitates attention to its prospective character and the specific relation to the future that reform entails (see Churchill et al. 2022, pp. 134–38). Here, we might draw on Reinhart Koselleck's (2004, pp. 255–76) notion of "horizons of expectation" to capture something of the reforming outlook. This suggests that reformers are necessarily oriented to something on the horizon—an abstract objective rather than an aspect of concrete experience. As such, theirs is a future that "cannot begin:" "The essential characteristic of a horizon is that we can never touch it, never get at it, never surpass it, but that in spite of that, it contributes to the definition of the situation" (Luhmann 1976, p. 140). In this respect, reform differs from other kinds of orientation to the future in the politics of criminal justice, including some abolitionist perspectives. Deeply skeptical concerning the historical experience of criminal justice reform and its present prospects (see, e.g., McDowell & Fernandez 2018, McHarris 2021, Vitale 2017), abolitionists may reject the reformer's horizon of expectation, positing the future instead as an emergent current in live processes of change (see Mathiesen 1974) or as an experiment in alternative practices and modes

of social organization (see Scott 2013). In sum, the regard for change, eventfulness, and tense in historical criminology provides insights for contemporary reform as well as a vital apparatus for a critical analysis of reform and other projects of change in the politics of criminal justice.

The Redemptive Impulse

At the heart of much criminological inquiry—and related to the critical concern to challenge common-sense perceptions of crime and criminals—is the imperative to humanize the offender and empathetically interpret their conduct. Thus, Godfrey (2017, p. 140) speaks of a “latent and unacknowledged romanticism” within criminology that impels researchers to make sense of the damaged or “ruined” lives of those seriously affected by crime or punishment. Godfrey locates this redemptive impulse within both life-course and desistance studies—which often focus on the recovery of “good” from lives that, for whatever reason, have turned “bad”—and social histories of crime—which arose in part from an effort to reveal the human dimensions of structural transformations in society and rescue the subjects of history from what E.P. Thompson (1991, p. 12) famously termed the “enormous condescension of posterity.” To these one might add a wider range of criminological research—including labeling theory, subcultural studies, and feminist scholarship—that eschews condemnation and instead seeks to understand or give voice to offenders and other marginal figures.

The redemptive impulse has deeply marked discussions of historical criminology in recent decades. Mary Bosworth’s early work in this area was impelled in part by the social historian Peter Linebaugh’s stipulation that researchers on punishment explore the perspectives of those subject to punishment, however difficult they are to recover (Bosworth 2000, 2001a,b; compare with Linebaugh 1991). For Bosworth, this means, in part, challenging the gender bias that has seen women’s historical experiences of imprisonment systemically neglected by comparison with men’s, but it also means revealing the human aspects of historical events and processes that schematic histories overlook. Her study of the 1795 massacre of female prisoners at the Salpêtrière institution in Paris zeroes in on the biographies of several individual women, recovering lives that had otherwise been forgotten and, in doing so, consciously forging an emotive narrative of mass violence (Bosworth 2001a). More recently, Alex Tepperman (2021) has likewise emphasized the value of microhistorical analysis in advancing the redemptive impulse. Retrieving quotidian details of the life of US political radical and prisoner Lee Lang from the archives, Tepperman aims at a more holistic, humanistic portrayal of a figure easily lost amid the mass of inmates.

What these carefully wrought microhistories achieve in an artisanal fashion, mass digitization projects have accomplished on an industrial scale. *The Digital Panopticon* (<https://www.digitalpanopticon.org/>), for example, is a vast project of linked historical databases connecting the records of London’s Old Bailey with a host of biometric, genealogical, and criminal justice data sets, including records of English prisons, transportation ships, and the Australian colonies. Despite an element of “industrial production” in its scale (Godfrey 2017), *The Digital Panopticon* still serves to humanize its subjects by “weaving together hitherto disparate fragments of ‘convict lives’” (Alker & Watkins 2018, p. 46). It can itemize criminal careers and provide insights into offenders’ appearances, health, families, and employment. In some instances, it offers glimpses into the lives of convicted offenders after their crimes or punishments were complete—something that prospective life-course studies struggle to accomplish (see Alker & Watkins 2018). Whereas singular bureaucratic records can reduce their subjects to quantities or legal categories, *The Digital Panopticon* refuses to define those punished at the Old Bailey purely by their criminal convictions. Instead, it helps to paint fuller, biographical pictures in which the lives of offenders and ex-offenders were “full of joy as well as misery, as much rehabilitation as recidivism, and. . .family relationships, employment, social life and so on” (Godfrey 2017, p. 151).

The above examples contribute to the redemptive impulse thanks as much to the historical approaches they adopt—how they exhibit the aspects of historical time outlined above—as to the historic (past) content they address. Their concern for events is perhaps especially notable. Bosworth's close attention to key events in the long history of the Salpêtrière—principally, the 1795 massacre—leads not just to a rich appreciation of these episodes but ultimately to a reconceptualization of prisons as institutions embodying gendered forms of discipline that are centuries old. Meanwhile, Godfrey (2017) argues that the cradle-to-grave life stories showcased by *The Digital Panopticon* demonstrate the futility of neat, essentialist categories of criminal and noncriminal, with offending typically appearing as a minor or transient aspect of individuals' biographies. Indeed, the historical character of Godfrey's work stems not just from the data he examines but also from the conceptual frameworks that he borrows from life-course criminology, with their eventful focus on trajectories and turning points (see Farrall et al. 2009). Famously developed by Laub & Sampson (1993) and now firmly established, trajectories and turning points encapsulate an essentially historical concern for the interplay of change and continuity through time as well as the transformative potential of contingent events (marriage, employment, etc.). Their concern for contingency and fluidity in (criminal) life courses is echoed by many qualitative studies of desistance, which foreground how offenders manage their criminal pasts and construct prosocial futures through specific narrative techniques (e.g., Maruna 2001; see also Presser & Sandberg 2015). Thus, across historic and contemporary settings, the redemptive impulse is powerfully served by an analytic engagement with historical time and the appreciation such an engagement breeds of the roles of contingency, circumstance, and constraint in shaping criminality.

The Public Impulse

A further driver of criminological scholarship, what we term the public impulse, impels us to engage with public audiences to further understanding of crime and criminal justice. This aligns with Nils Christie's (2011, p. 709) remark that criminologists' most meaningful role may be as "cultural workers in the field of deviance and social control" (see also McAra 2016). Although we live "in a society saturated with 'crime talk'" (Chancer & McLaughlin 2007, p. 157), public engagement around criminological issues presents certain difficulties. In a time of penal populism, reasoned, critical knowledge, grounded in empirical research, is always likely to be marginalized by dominant media discourses. Equally, though, opportunities for academic public engagement are perhaps increasing, notably through social media (Wood et al. 2019), podcasts, and other online platforms that seem to offer routes to reaching publics beyond the editorial procedures of the mass media. Still, the question for the present article is what historical criminology has to contribute to public understanding and to cultural work in the criminal justice field.

A major role for historical criminology arises specifically from the need for informed and insightful commentary on popular representations of criminal pasts and their power to mold collective memories and shape cultural identities in the present. Research on memory and the past in contemporary culture necessarily exceeds the bounds of conventional historiography, incorporating what Rafter (2000) described as the endless process in which society and cultural representations mirror each other. The field of transitional justice has proved very fruitful for this broad line of work (e.g., Karstedt 2009), but there are similar opportunities across a wider spectrum of criminological research. Consider, for example, Kehinde Andrews's (2016) research on the depiction of the transatlantic slave trade in motion pictures, which formed the basis for the documentary film *The Psychosis of Whiteness* (Nulman 2018). The film offers an important critique of how contemporary films on slavery offer an imagined version of the past that serves to ease White guilt over the slave trade's horror, diminish Britain's role in the trade, downplay the role of racism, and marginalize Black agency. As criminology, in a global context, comes to

face the decolonization of the field, such historical perspectives offer a means of engaging with collective memories of empire, colonialism, and slavery that haunt contemporary culture and continue to exercise material consequences for contemporary society.

In the public arena, many societies face ongoing debates about renaming streets and public places or removing statues and other memorials to figures linked to past atrocities. To the charge that such acts amount to “rewriting history” (e.g., Forsythe 2021), an appreciation of historical time discloses the necessity of revision to historical understanding. As we are all emplaced in historical time, there is no universal history; rather, we are faced with a battleground of ideas and interpretations that necessarily shift with the times (Jenkins 1991). Such basic insights direct debate instead toward what and how we ought to remember. We might thus see statues and place names associated (for example) with slavery as evoking what Jacques Derrida termed a specter—an element of the past that refuses to be consigned to history and returns to unsettle and disrupt the culture of the present (Coverley 2020, Derrida 2006). We might also see the empty plinth in Bristol where the statue of slave trader Edward Colston once stood—before it was removed by protestors in 2020—as a more eloquent statement concerning Britain’s past than the statue itself. The politics of memorialization in such contexts provides a ready outlet for scholarly interventions concerning the way we relate to our pasts (e.g., Riley 2020). It reminds us too that in research on serious crimes and atrocities in times past, there is a valuable and productive role for judgment as well as for understanding (see de Haan 2015).

Equally, criminologists have much to contribute to the framing of notable public issues by exposing their historical precursors—by recasting perhaps forgotten, prior events in terms of a notable, recent event. For example, The Open University and BBC documentary film *The Fires That Foretold Grenfell* (Roberts 2018)—for which critical criminologist Steve Tombs acted as an academic consultant—offers a historical retelling of the Grenfell Tower fire (2017) via a series of fires, dating from 1973, that in some way illuminate the outcome at Grenfell. It highlights political decisions leading to the deregulation of building standards in pursuit of profit as well as the ill-fated “stay put” fire response policy that had also failed victims in previous fires. Thus, the film raises questions of state power, responsibility, marginalization, and vulnerability. More importantly for present purposes, it demonstrates how analyzing the prehistory of an event and the sequence of events that led to it, revisiting its precursors and antecedents in light of what we know now, offers a path to greater public understanding of the nature and causes of major events of concern to criminologists. Taken together, these contributions to public debate suggest something of the role that a more historically informed criminology may have in informing public discourse about crime and related matters.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS: WHERE NEXT FOR HISTORICAL CRIMINOLOGY?

If historical criminology is, as we have claimed, one of a handful of basic approaches to the study of crime and justice, then a detailed survey of promising avenues for future research is plainly beyond the scope of this article. A tremendous range of problems and topics will surely be illuminated and recast over the coming years through the application of historical perspectives of one kind or another. In this final section, we seek to outline instead how certain ways of thinking about historical time might yield quite broad opportunities for research to advance and address certain major concerns or lacunae within criminology. Thus, we address in turn the potential contribution of connected histories to a global criminology, the prospect of sustained criminological engagement with events, and the possibility of historical research on crime and justice futures.

Global Criminology and Connected Histories

Although for some a global criminology is best pursued through the development of general theories of crime (e.g., Gottfredson 2018), comparative criminologists have long stressed the importance of cross-cultural differences in crime and justice and their symbolic construction (e.g., Karstedt 2001, Nelken 2010). The nascent field of Southern criminology incorporates a similar concern for cultural difference but, in addition, emphasizes that asymmetrical geopolitical power relations have resulted in the global dominance of distinct criminological knowledges produced by and for the global North. This Northern or metropolitan criminology identifies crime as an urban phenomenon occurring internally within nation-states during peacetime. It thus sidelines serious crime problems (such as armed conflict, drug wars, and ethnic cleansing) and broader historical experiences and processes (including settlement, colonization, and systemic racial violence) that have occurred mostly in the global South, and that have, in many instances, “bled into the present” (Nagy 2020), creating enduring experiences of harm and injustice (Carrington et al. 2016; see also Aas 2012). There are, of course, considerable differences in historical experience across the global South—between settler societies like Australia and nonsettler societies in much of Africa and Asia, for example, or indeed between the various legal and cultural traditions found across Asia (Liu 2009)—just as there is heterogeneity in the societies of the global North (e.g., Pratt 2008; see also Carrington et al. 2016). Thus, rather than a fixation on particular territories, Southern criminology is better understood as an approach sensitized to the views and experiences of those rendered invisible, peripheral, or subaltern by global asymmetries of power and knowledge. By embracing “new and diverse perspectives,” it seeks to forge a criminology more “inclusive and befitting of the world in which we live” (Carrington et al. 2016, p. 2).

For present purposes, the crucial point lies in the importance of the historical within an inclusive global criminology. Kerry Carrington and her colleagues posit that criminology must “recover histories rooted in colonialism to enable it to more usefully account for the divergent patterns of crime, violence and justice that occur outside the metropole and their power effects on everyday life in the global South” (Carrington et al. 2016, p. 15). Eileen Baldry and Chris Cunneen exemplify this approach in their work on the overrepresentation of Indigenous women in Australian prisons. They argue that colonial and patriarchal attitudes remain entrenched within contemporary Australian sentencing and penal practices. The result is an “unbroken chain” (Baldry & Cunneen 2014, pp. 290–91) of race and gender discrimination that connects contemporary penal excesses to the era of colonization. This echoes Michelle Alexander’s (2012) argument, in an American context, that the disproportionate incarceration of African Americans is a contemporary iteration of an entrenched project of racialized social control that was also visible in historic systems of slavery and segregation. Thus, across distinct geographical contexts, a historical understanding of specific, consequential events and processes appears integral to the practice of global criminology (see also Nagy 2020).

There are rich opportunities to develop further the historical contribution to global criminology, including through the framework of connected histories. Sanjay Subrahmanyam famously posited that, instead of grouping together countries or cultures into homogenized blocks for purposes of comparison, the global study of history should concentrate on interaction between peoples, states, and cultures, studying the circulation, exchange, and interdependence of ideas, institutions, and technologies to make visible the “fragile threads” that have connected the globe (Subrahmanyam 1997, p. 762; see also Potter & Saha 2015). Connected histories, therefore, examine the events, processes, and networks that link heterogeneous parts of the world, illuminating the global scale of human societies while recognizing that the interactions that constitute this global dimension are often multidirectional and marked by power imbalances and cultural differences. Similarly, Gurminder Bhambra (2010) calls for connected approaches to

sociology that recognize how (what are often termed) the global core and periphery are mutually constitutive. Many parts of the global periphery have been decisively shaped by European colonization, but, equally, the core imperialist states of Europe have been impacted by knowledge, resources, and wealth acquired or appropriated from their colonies. At stake here is not a counterbalance to traditional Eurocentrism within history or sociology but a more direct challenge to it, which sees colonialism as a two-way process that was (and is) integral to Western modernity as a historical phenomenon. As such, Western modernity appears as a particular, not a universal historical condition—a local way of being in the world rather than a general yardstick of cultural development (Fabian 1983). Through connected histories, though, we can also avoid reducing the plurality of historical times across the globe to a synchronous whole—whether through the embrace of multiple modernities (Bhambra 2010) or perhaps by focusing on points of synchronization in an otherwise complex and chaotic web of historical threads (see also Bevernage 2016).

So, rather than a search for a universal theory of crime—or, indeed, the criminological study of globalization (see Aas 2012)—a global criminology might additionally or alternatively entail a concern for the historical, mutually constitutive interconnections between, across, and within societies across the globe. As noted above, the contemporary overrepresentation of non-White peoples within the criminal justice systems of Australia and the United States—as well as, indeed, many other settler or imperialist nations—makes only limited sense without a diachronic consideration of how global historical connections based on slavery and colonialism continue to shape these societies. More generally, the complex patchwork of similarity and difference that animates crime and justice globally can be unpicked by examining the transnational historical threads from which it is woven. This focus on connecting threads can reveal how key historical events have shaped our respective presents in contrasting ways; it can shed light on why some historical traumas or conflicts recede into the past while others remain painful or heated in the present; and it can reveal the historical legacies still embodied in particular contemporary institutions or cultural practices. In these ways, historical perspectives and insights might prove fundamental to a new global criminology based around interconnected histories and their reverberations down to the present.

An Eventful Criminology

Criminological research is saturated with references to events—terror attacks, incidents of disorder, murders, disasters, even scandals within the criminal justice system. Some penetrate the social consciousness much more significantly than others—not only do they become newsworthy, but also they may stimulate wider changes in law, culture, or society, or they may live long in collective memory. Yet it is unusual for events themselves to be the object of criminological analysis. There are certainly prominent examples of work that places events at center stage—notably in the literature on collective disorder (e.g., Natl. Advis. Comm. Civ. Disord. 1968, Newburn 2016) and moral panic (e.g., Cohen 2002, Hall et al. 1978)—yet such work remains both uncommon and largely confined to a small subset of those events that connect closely to criminological concerns. Some criminologists perhaps consider events epiphenomenal—the surface expression of deeper, more basic structural forces shaping crime and justice. Thus, one might collate events as data for aggregate analysis in an effort to disclose something of the social reality behind or beneath the events themselves. Perhaps more commonly, criminologists tend to address certain social situations—policing in south London, drug treatment in San Francisco, memories of violence in Rwanda—that straddle the interval in which data are collected. Yet events elude structures and situations. They can be thought of as critical junctures, turning points, moments of structural change (Sewell 2005); the event marks a rupture between situations (Pachter 1974) or between past and future (Abrams 1982). Hence, along with many other social scientists (Abbott 2001),

criminologists are ever in danger of letting events slip through their grasp—of losing sight of their foretelling, emergence, rupture, denotation, representation, domestication, and so on (see Sewell 2005, Wagner-Pacifici 2017).

As outlined above, to think in terms of events is part of what it means to think historically. A major opportunity for historical criminology, then, is to contribute to an eventful criminology, offering both substantive studies of specific events and original analytical frameworks to support such studies. One might start with the biography of notable events pertaining to the crime and justice field. This entails a shift from seeking the general truth or emblematic quality in an event to studying its peculiarities as an individual happening, unique in time and place (see Burke 2005). Almost invariably, the event is studied in retrospect, but an intimate and involved biography of an event may also emerge from scholars who happen to find themselves on the ground as it takes place (see, e.g., Raymen & Smith 2016, Treadwell et al. 2013). From its biography, one might ask broader questions about the historical significance of the event: Did it mark the transition from one time to another? How far was the appearance of movement and instability belied by historical continuities connecting before and after? One might also combine synchronic (in-time) and diachronic (across-times) perspectives, bringing together an investigation of how exactly the event unfolded, how it channeled various preceding conditions and inheritances, and subsequently how its consequences emerged and its meanings became settled. This challenges the researcher to be sensitive to the shifting contours of historical context while also keeping the event itself in motion—to unite the prehistory and afterlife with the dynamic core of the event taking place.

Consider, for example, the murder of George Floyd by a White police officer in Minneapolis in 2020. This recent event has stimulated considerable interest among criminologists, yet much scholarship focuses on debates that have proceeded in its wake, whether concerning police reform, policing practice, or political protest (e.g., Cobbina-Dungy et al. 2022, Mourtgos et al. 2021). There is the need, of course, to connect the particular event to the long-term history of African Americans, racial inequality, and police violence, yielding an analysis that links the specificities of time and place to the experience and memories of multiple generations. Yet there is scope for more creative readings too. Fiddler et al.'s (2022) study incorporates diverse events in Minneapolis that preceded Floyd's murder. They return us to the arrival of European American settlers in 1680 who competed for resources with the Indigenous Dakota Sioux. Later, in 1787, with human bondage perpetuated, the Dakota Sioux were starved and interned, leading to their exile from the territory. Racial inequality and authoritarian violence are shown to have a heritage leading back over three centuries. Furthermore, inspired by a growing interest in hauntology—a body of scholarship that builds upon Derrida's (2006) notion of the specter and Mark Fisher's (2016) concepts of the weird and the eerie—the authors also consider how an imagined future event can still haunt the present (Fiddler et al. 2022, p. 2):

Minneapolis. 2075. Rising temperatures across central America, gigafires across California and Oregon, rising water levels in Florida, increasingly numerous and severe storms across the Gulf of Mexico have driven vast swathes of the population north and east. Refugee camps encircle the city. Marginalized groups, made up of black, Indigenous, and other people of color, are disproportionately excluded from the city's resources.

The future envisioned here not only reflects a continuation of past racial inequality and exclusion within Minneapolis but also foresees how this inequality and exclusion are exacerbated by the unfolding environmental crisis that haunts the present. Events, then, are not just moments in time, but aspects of extended sequences and broader histories. Amid ongoing contests over the meaning and significance of particular events relating to crime and justice, there lies a rich field for historical criminology to help cultivate.

Historical Futures for Crime and Justice

Conceived as an interdisciplinary meeting point between history and criminology, historical criminology raises questions concerning the relation between past and present. Our conception of historical criminology, though, places no such special emphasis on the past and its contemporary resonances. Seen as a regard for historical time, historical criminology in principle has as much to say about futures for crime and justice. Indeed, the contribution historical criminology has to make to understanding futures is perhaps especially significant, given that criminology—like other social sciences—encounters deep ontological and methodological difficulties in grappling with the future (compare with Tutton 2016). Most criminological work directed explicitly to the future constitutes either personal reflections on possible directions for criminological research or an analysis of apparently emergent trends or trajectories in the present landscape of crime and control. The rarity of fully fledged future studies highlights the potential for really significant contributions through an engagement with historical time.

Perhaps the most accessible route to addressing futures is to investigate the various visions of the future that orient and inform actors in crime and justice in a given present. There is already an appreciable literature, for example, on how convicted offenders imagine futures for themselves, their families and wider communities, and the role such imagined futures play in driving desistance (see, among others, Halsey & Harris 2011, Maruna 2001, Paternoster & Bushaway 2009). The interest in present futures found in such pockets of criminological research might usefully be propagated more generally, such that we come to understand more about future orientations and practices of future-making among debut offenders, persistent criminals, police officers, policy makers, and others and how such visions become encoded in particular projects, spaces, and institutions (see, e.g., Armstrong 2013). A wider field of future vision would enable a stronger comparative analysis of the distinct ways in which futures are construed and practiced across the crime and justice field: from the “horizons of expectation” (Churchill et al. 2018; Koselleck 2004, pp. 255–76) that often characterize projects of reform to the anticipatory logics of “pre-crime” measures (Zedner 2007) and from the demographic foresight of prison population forecasting (Armstrong 2013) to the prefigurative politics of “the unfinished” (Mathiesen 1974) that propels certain radical and abolitionist programs of change. The concern for tense in historical criminology invites thoroughgoing investigation into how the future is imagined and enacted in various domains of crime and justice, how such diverse and dissonant future imaginaries and practices connect and collide, and what social consequences follow from them.

What, though, of research concerned not with present futures in crime and justice but with the future as such? How, practically, might historical criminology contribute to the study of that which is yet to come? This is a large and difficult question that permits only provisional and somewhat speculative answers. Perhaps the most obvious strategy is to integrate a fuller concern for historical time into existing futures research methods. For example, some criminologists have embraced horizon-scanning methods, reviewing published literature and secondary data on particular drivers of change (such as environmental or technological developments) to establish possible outcomes in terms of crime and their implications for policy and prevention (e.g., Johnston et al. 2019, White & Heckenberg 2011). Such studies incorporate an appreciation of change, yet a more fully historical approach might dig deeper into the character of change thus postulated: Would it be sufficient to inaugurate a new epoch, historically distant from our own? If so, what of our present might still resonate in theirs as a useable past? We might also expand the analytical framework to incorporate other aspects of historical time: How might contingent events derail or reroute the trajectories implied by the posited horizons? What might be the historical outlook of the future generation inhabiting this horizon? How might they make sense of their past (including our

present), present, and future? Such questions invite a diachronic perspective on pathways leading to the posited horizon—as an eventful sequence or process of change—while also deepening the synchronic focus on the horizon itself, its historical character and subjectivity.⁵

More adventurously, historical criminologists might experiment with approaches to futures research that align more closely with a regard for historical time. One such method is perhaps utopian writing. There is a modest criminological literature on crime and related issues in utopian writing, as well as a somewhat broader regard for the importance of utopia for criminology (see, among others, Malloch & Munro 2013; Ruggiero 2013; Seal & O'Neill 2021, pp. 117–32; Young 1992). Utopia offers a means of specifying a preferred future beyond the parameters of governmental technologies of, for example, penal planning (Armstrong 2013). Whether modest or grand in scale and ambition, utopian writing immediately connects to issues of historical change and embodiment and offers a rich format for interrogating the historical possibilities presented by the present situation (Young 1992, pp. 427–28). Another conducive method might be termed speculative history—a history written from a posited future, which narrates the events leading thereto, and analyzes a future past incorporating our past, present, and future. Fictive future histories somewhat like this have formed the basis of notable works of sociology and social criticism (e.g., Young 1994).⁶ They have the potential to challenge commonplace assumptions about the character of contemporary crime and justice, cast in novel historical perspective through the introduction of a surprising yet superficially plausible future destination. Perhaps somewhat eclectic, these prospective genres might nevertheless fruitfully open up questions concerning the scope and desirability of certain sorts of change in criminal justice.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, recent years seem to have heralded a newfound spirit of reflection on the nature and prospects of historical research in criminology. The resulting scholarly commentary and exchange have yet to run their course; things remain in flux, and historical criminology remains a contested term. Different conceptions of historical criminology—concerned with archival methods, practical inquiry, temporality, and interdisciplinarity—jostle for consideration. These are serious contributions to criminological scholarship, and criminology as a field has much to gain from the further development of each. This article has examined one such conception of historical criminology—a notion associated closely with historical time—in greater detail to suggest something of the import of historical perspectives to core impulses within criminology and to gesture to some of the research opportunities that a developed concern for change, eventfulness, flow, tense, and temporal embodiment might unlock. In particular, we have highlighted three quite broad areas—global criminology, eventful criminology, and futures research—where historical thinking as we have characterized it has much to add and where such advances in scholarship promise rich rewards for the field at large. However research develops over the years to come, though, the basic idea of cultivating a kind of historical scholarship closely attuned to the requirements of criminology as an academic field will surely retain its appeal. If such a fully fledged historical criminology does indeed become established and institutionalized within the field, then the future of criminology as a whole will be that much brighter for it.

⁵One might seek similarly to broaden other largely synchronic methods of futures research, such as scenario methods (see also Staley 2002).

⁶They also bear a certain resemblance to the backcasting technique in scenario analysis (Höjer & Mattsson 2000).

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors are not aware of any affiliations, memberships, funding, or financial holdings that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this review.

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Insightful analysis of Foucault's genealogical method and its foundation in critique of the present.

Fertile discussion of archival methods as conducive to a grounded, agent-centered historical research methodology.

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