

PUNISHMENT

“In this unique textbook, which is scholarly yet accessible to students, Miethe and Lu approach punishment from a perspective that is both historical and comparative, addressing the global dimensions of punishment as few authors do.”

Gray Cavender, Arizona State University

Informed by current scholarship, yet tailored to the needs of undergraduate students, this textbook presents a broad perspective on one of the most fundamental social practices. Punishment is the common response to crime and deviance in all societies. However, its particular form and purpose are also linked to specific structural features of these societies in a particular time and place. Through a comparative historical analysis, the authors identify and examine the sources of similarity and difference in types of economic punishments, incapacitation devices and structures, and lethal and nonlethal forms of corporal punishment over time and place. They look closely at punishment responses to crime and deviance across different regions of the world and in specific countries like the United States, China, and Saudi Arabia. In this way readers gain an appreciation for both the universal and context-specific nature of punishment and its use for purposes of social control, social change, and the elimination of threat to the prevailing authorities.

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PUNISHMENT

A Comparative Historical Perspective

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Punishment is a basic fact of human life. We impose punishment in formal and informal settings for a variety of purposes of social control, social change, and order maintenance. Previous studies of punishment also indicate that its nature and prevalence vary over time and place.

Using a comparative historical approach, the goal in this book is to illustrate the similarities and differences in punishment responses over time and place. We review current punishment practices across world regions and use case studies of the United States, China, and Saudi Arabia for detailed investigation of the comparative and historical contexts of punishment. Through this comparative historical perspective, the reader should gain an appreciation of the universal and context-specific nature of punishment practices.

There is an enormous academic and popular literature on punishment. Sociologists and other social scientists have long been interested in the topic of punishment, social control, and the structure of society. Various human rights organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch also provide current reports and commentary about punishment practices throughout most countries of the world. By providing detailed references to this previous research and a list of suggested readings in each chapter, we hope this book will serve as a research guide and inspire others to further examine the nature and effectiveness of punishment responses to crime and deviance across a wide range of social, political, and economic contexts.

Our views about punishment expressed in this book are a reflection of our personal experiences and academic training. We are especially appreciative of the insights of colleagues and mentors that have shaped our perspective and challenged us to go beyond the conventional wisdom. While we are

responsible for any errors of omission and commission in this book, our colleagues have contributed to the potential insights about punishment that derive from this comparative historical study.

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