

Richter Literature Review:

**Introduction:**

My general topic is to examine the development of imperialism in Britain through patterns of imprisonment under the auspices of confining madmen during the age of the enlightenment. Specifically: I would like to review imprisonment records and archives concerning middle class London men and women of the ages 18-30 in 1750 and look for commonalities in the arrests that had nothing to do with crime.

There have been large theoretical works produced on the topic and many generalizations made about the connection between the developments of the concept of madness in the age of reason. There have also been plenty of studies on deviance in London about the impoverished juvenile population and the impoverished class as a whole.<sup>1</sup> Examining the trends of imprisonment however has been largely confined to the British exportation of thousands of criminals to the New World and Australia. The targeted populations of this export were traditionally blue-collar thieves of minorities and petty crooks that were either homeless or in prison at the time of their deportation.<sup>2</sup> Of this literature, there are three principle groups of works I have reviewed: (1) theoretical works of linking the conception of madness to the conception of reason, (2) The articles and works specifically on crime in 18<sup>th</sup> century London and (3) works on the structure of imperial governments and the problem of nationalism.

The reasons for these separate groups align with the three main concerns about the topic that I made sure to cover in my literature review. First, I wanted to see what connections had already been made between imperialism and punishment within empires

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<sup>1</sup> See Macrauld and Neal, "Child-stripping in the Victorian City"; Dabhoiwala, "Sex and Societies for Moral Reform, 1688-1800."

<sup>2</sup> Morgan and Rushton, "Print Culture, Crime and Transportation in the Criminal Atlantic."

home populous. Second, I felt the need to familiarize myself with the existing questions surrounding crime in 18<sup>th</sup> century London, and, third, I wanted to better understand the historical, political, and social contexts of London in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The theoretical works point to madness as an excuse to imprison the destitute of society while the historical works point to destitution as a reason for imprisonment.

**Body:**

Spierenburg's *The Spectacle of Suffering*, Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* and Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* are works that link madness to civilization and the enlightenment. Each offers a slightly different conclusion and analysis of the age of the enlightenment, but they are all critical of the age of reason and the development of the concept of madness. They all touch on the concept of madness itself and its development over time. Each of these works however substantial their historical summary of madness' development, lacks substantial economic data and reasons for the imprisonment of the destitute they claim to be represented in the prisons and asylums. Most importantly, each of these works defines a method of institutionalization that is part of historical development into modernity. In Spierenburg he defines the problem as a difference "between two areas of social development: the development of mentalities and changes in human organization...Modes of repression belong to the history of mentalities."<sup>3</sup> Foucault finds the problem in the development of the concept of madness itself as it is tied to the development of the concept of rationality, which he examines through art and the enlightenment.<sup>4</sup> The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is most severe and ties the ordering of society as a self-destructive problem that is

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<sup>3</sup> Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering*. 200.

<sup>4</sup> Foucault, *Madness and Civilization; a History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*.

dependent on mass culture. “Something is provided for all so that none may escape; the distinctions are emphasized and extended” or in the case of madmen and criminals: repressed and confined.<sup>5</sup> However, the crossover, and main point, in all three works is in the development of modernity resulting in forms of institutionalization. It is my aim to examine these conclusions backwards and look at political-historical movements in imprisonment that happened *because* the concepts of reason and madness were introduced in an age of political turmoil.

The books related to political examination that supplements this understanding of London politics and historical development up to 1750 are: *The London Hanged, Discipline and Punish, Crime in Early Modern England, 1550 to 1750*, and *Rogues, thieves, and the rule of law, 1718-1800*<sup>6</sup>. The articles I have examined thus far for a study on what has been done with this knowledge of development up till 1750 are: “Policing and Punishment in London 1660-1750: Urban Crime and the Limits of Terror”, “Exorcising Madness in Late Elizabethan England” and “Evolving Function: Early Use of Imprisonment as Punishment.”<sup>7</sup> These works provide a solid sketch of the development of the circumstances leading to the criminal life in London in 1750. They also point out populations that were largely effected. The main connections are to economic circumstances and the targeting of minority and destitute social groups. The notion of politics is put aside as an obvious factor but not a major concern of development.

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<sup>5</sup> Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. 123.

<sup>6</sup> Linebaugh, *The London hanged*; Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*; Emsley, *Crime and society in England, 1750-1900*; Morgan and Rushton, *Rogues, thieves, and the rule of law the problem of law enforcement in north-east England, 1718-1800*.

<sup>7</sup> Innes, “Policing and Punishment in London 1660-1750”; Williams, “Exorcising Madness in Late Elizabethan England”; Johnston, “Evolving Function.”

## **Conclusion:**

The works above have produced new understandings of Crime in England and the larger problems of institutionalization, specifically prisons. The articles reviewed for the specific content of what conclusions have been made about criminals in 1750 are incredibly recent works, the oldest produced in 2004. The main aspects that each of these works touch on is the problem of crime in England and its connection to policies of oppression implemented by the British government. However, the current explanations of why the government intervened are lacking: they point to racism, elitism, and social prejudices. Moreover, the ideological element of confinement is, for lack of a better word, confined to the ideas of social and economic development. Thus, the area of study is looking at Criminals as a product of political and historical development, caught in the cross hairs of the enlightenment.

The main conclusions of the works complement each other: they blame the construction of the class system for the development of the institutions of imprisonment *but in a strictly socio-economic sense*. Political power is an assumed factor in imprisonment, but to this point, is lacking an examination or clear cause. Thus, it is my aim to understand the politics behind the imprisonment of those considered less in both respects of economic destitution *and* madness in the political sense..

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