[**ON THE HISTORY OF PUNISHMENT
IN AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND**](On_the_history_of_punishment.htm)

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**Those engaged in research on the history of punishment may be so for a variety of motives. Some may be driven by pure intellectual curiosity, others, perhaps, by sublimated punitive impulses. Others still, not content with a mere understanding of the forces which have shaped penal policy, seek to influence these forces now and in the future. But our concern here is history as an independent variable: Of what use is it? What purpose does it serve? What can it achieve?**

**Research on the history of punishment can enhance our understanding of contemporary issues. Occasionally, even governments seek out historical knowledge. (eg, Gurr, Grabosky and Hula, 1977; Grabosky 1977). Lamentably, governmental interest in affairs of the past now appears all but non-existent, and practitioners of criminal justice tend not to be appreciative of historical inquiry. At best, the nostalgia buffs among them find it interesting, if not terribly useful. The more cynical, whose vision extends no further than the next election, are probably inclined to the attitude of Henry Ford: 'History is more or less bunk.'**

**History and Practice**

**This lack of enthusiasm shown by today's policy makers and administrators should not, however, discourage scholars from adopting an historical perspective. I would argue that in addition to creating knowledge for its own sake, historical research can make a very real contribution to the development and implementation of contemporary policy.**

**The first way in which such relevance can be demonstrated is by learning from our mistakes. In the words of Santayana, those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. An exploration of notable past failures of policy and administration can yield general principles, if not explicit lessons, which might be applicable to contemporary matters. We can of course learn from successes as well as failures.**

**The emergence of criminal justice professionalism provides an excellent market for usable history. Recent and very noteworthy progress in the professionalisation of police and correctional services has been accompanied by significant investments in training. A compelling argument can be made that training curricula should be enriched by historical materials.**

**With agencies of criminal justice adopting a managerial ethos, the analogy of management training may be useful. The world's leading schools of business and**