

## Book Review

### Crime Policy in America

**Shahid M Shahidullah. 2008.**  
**University Press of America, Inc. xii+307**

This is an information-packed tome on criminal justice policies in the United States. Written by a former Dhaka University graduate from the Sociology department and now a Professor at Virginia State University, the author traces the historical, philosophical and legal development of policies relating to crime and justice. Divided into seven chapters, it defines and examines crime policy, federal intervention, policies on drug crimes, juvenile justice, sex crimes, cyberspace criminality and emerging trends.

The codes of Hammurabi, the Sumerian Code and Magna Carta, Hobbes, Freud all find their references. But in the US, it was the Bill of Rights, adopted in 1791, that gave the young nation its first document from which to draw later policies. Amazingly, policy development in criminal justice is still an on-going process, and surprisingly, most of it comes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This has been necessitated by changes that have occurred in society: growing and diverse population, economic prosperity, rapid technological advances, urban societies, shifts in family values, sexual liberties, compassionate attitudes, drugs, etc.

Once dictated by harshness, policies later became realities based on reason and science. As crimes and their nature increased, so did the examination on what basis they were to be drawn up.

At first a matter of the individual states, the criminal justice policies came into the fold of the federal government as society became more complex and rapid industrial and technological advances proceeded. The role of the President of the United States, Congress and Judiciary are all examined. Thomas Jefferson, the third President, emphasized that justice was to prevail in the United States. But the first to piece together a coherent policy on crime and justice was Herbert Hoover (1929-1933).

Particularly interesting is the chapter on juvenile justice. First a matter of the states, it was not until 1970s that it became a federal concern. Dr Shahidullah traces the philosophical, historical and legal antecedents for setting up separate courts for juvenile offenders. Current policies take into cognizance that the State is responsible for the welfare of the children as citizens and also for their correction.

Policies on sex crimes took into account that women and children must be protected against sexual abuse. More importantly, policies were drawn up by men and it was men who committed most of the sex crimes. That sex crimes left permanent scars in the minds of its victims was recognized. In addition to prostitution, pornography, obscenity and child abuse that are the considerations of policy, the current alarming factor is sexual offences created over the Internet.

Having brought us up to speed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the author in the last chapter writes about the latest consideration for policy --- cyberspace crime. In a digitalized society, the Internet has opened up vistas for international crime on identity theft, software robbery, fraud, cyberspace marketing, child pornography, storage and retrieval of data wrongfully. The gamut of areas this applies to is mind boggling. The author's analytical mind is, perhaps, best shown here.

The book is a must-read for the undergraduate and graduate students. It is as much for experts drawing up legislation on crime and justice and is relevant in Bangladesh's context. They can rely on no less than 35 tables, with figures and dates, and over 400 reference citations. It is available in hardcover and paper back.

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