

DESTITUTION, DISGRACE AND PUNISHMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

Why has the prison returned to the institutional forefront of contemporary societies around the world, including in Chile, when a half-century ago observers of criminal justice were unanimous in predicting its imminent disappearance? To resolve this historical conundrum, I put forth three theses. First, against both mainstream criminology and Foucaultian scholarship, I argue that the expansion and glorification of the police, the courts and the penitentiary are a response, not to criminal insecurity, but to the spread of social insecurity and ethnic anxiety. Second, I deploy Bourdieu's "bureaucratic field" to connect social and penal policies and show that they constitute two variants of poverty policy that must be studied and reformed together. Third, I propose that the expansion and glorification of punishment as a material and symbolic agency is a core political transformation of the early 21st century partaking of the building of a novel Leviathan, and that the social sciences must urgently construct a robust concept of the penal state to understand and guide it.