Fear and Fortune: Robbery in London in the Late Eighteenth Century

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Public representation of highwaymen and footpads in the press spawned a climate of fear in London. Descriptions of the violence that highwaymen and footpads employed in the course of their crimes generated this fear. Violence set them apart from other non- or less-violent thefts that occurred in much greater numbers in the capital, but received less coverage in the public discussion of crime at the time. Victims of robbery came from all different social classes and demographic groups, and this too contributed to the fear by creating an image of robbers who could attack anyone at any time. This ardent fear appeared to have overshadowed some of the new social and economic explanations of criminals’ motives and emerging humanitarian approaches to crime prevention.

The court records suggest that highwaymen and footpads were often young men who operated in organized gangs and used violence to create fear and ensure success in their attack – and this paralleled the public perceptions. However, the trials show that women did in fact account for a small – but noticeable – percentage of robbers, and robbers also acted individually as well as in groups. The court proceedings also demonstrated that highwaymen and footpads created networks with prostitutes, alehouses, pawnshops, and workhouses in order find potential victims, recruit new robbers, peddle pilfered goods, and increase the odds of successfully accomplishing their crime and escaping.
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Acknowledgement and Dedication:

I would like to acknowledge and dedicate this thesis to all those who have helped me and been there for me over the past two years.
Fig. 1

“London in Miniature, with the surrounding villages entire new plan in which the improvements both present and intended are actually reduced (by permission) from the surveys of the several proprietors” by Edward Mogg (1806). In this map Mogg illustrated the downtown areas consumed by the London Fire of 1666 highlighted in red. With this map, Mogg intended to highlight the various city works and urban renewal projects which the city pursued in the early nineteenth century. Image courtesy of the Wikimedia Commons [public domain].
Stories of crime have been told and readapted for new generations throughout
time, from Robin Hood to Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. What is it about crime
that has fascinated people? The crime novelist Agatha Christie once wrote “Crime is
terribly revealing. Try and vary your methods as you will, your tastes, your habits, your
attitude of mind, and your soul is revealed by your actions.”¹ What can a study of crime
tell us about the souls of those who engaged in it? What part did crime play on the stage
of everyday life in the past? How did the “criminals” and the “non-criminals” define
themselves and each other? How did those in London not engaged in crime perceive
criminals, and how did these perceptions compare to the lived experiences? In this thesis
I seek to answer these questions by studying one distinct crime in a specific context –
robberies that occurred in London during a time of great change, the end of the eighteenth
century. The history of robbery tells us that eighteenth-century Londoners’ view of
robbers focused on the extreme cases. The public perception created a mass amount of
fear in the discussion of crime, and this fear overpowered emerging understandings of
criminal motives and desires to reform criminals.

**Topic, Argument and Evidence**

The last two decades of the eighteenth century were a transitional time for Great
Britain. London during this period emerged not only as the epicenter of an empire in the
midst of great change and expansion but also a capital of the early days of the British
Industrial Revolution. Industrial development and economic growth led to an influx of

rural workers and immigrants, and the population of London expanded from 750,000 in 1760 to 1.4 million people by 1815. More people living in the city meant that the number of crimes committed in London increased during this time.

Londoners put into place administrative and structural changes in response to crime through the establishment of formalized policing forces and the reformation of prisons and punishments. The *Bow Street Runners* are considered one of London’s first “professional” police force, and the group consisted of only six members when Henry Fielding founded it in 1749. With the eruption of war in the American Colonies in 1776, the courts no longer exiled criminals to America. The transportation of criminals did not resume until the founding of Australia as a penal colony in the 1790s. Another element of London’s metamorphosis in the late eighteenth century was an increased awareness of crime fostered by the newspapers. The surge in population and heterogeneity, the burgeoning industrial revolution and a growth in the discussion surrounding criminal activity all combined to make London at the end of the eighteenth century a particularly good place and time to study the place of crime and criminals in an early industrializing society.

My research on crime first emerged from an interest in anthropological and cultural history, in particular the study of rituals and subcultures. Did a criminal subculture exist, and if so, what sort of rituals and characteristics made up this alternate culture? By criminal subculture I mean the shared rhetoric, rituals, symbols and values

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4 Transportation was a form of punishment for many crimes including robbery before the war broke out; Clive Emsley, Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, "Punishment at the Old Bailey", *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0, 07 April 2012).
of groups of people who participated in criminal activity. Aside from the act of the crime itself, what, if anything, made those involved in criminal activity different from the other Londoners living around them? Conversely, to what degree was crime a part of the fabric of local communities? Did it seem isolated or was it bound up in the ways that the communities operated?

This study sets out to probe robbery in London during the early Industrial Revolution by first looking at popular perceptions of criminality. Then I ask how those perceptions lined up with the characteristics of robbers and their victims seen in court cases as well as the relationships and web of networks between crime and everyday life in London. My goal is to better understand the everyday relationships and interactions of life in London in the late eighteenth century, and how crime impacted them.

I began my research by looking for a sub-culture surrounding robbery and I found it, to a point, in Londoners’ perceptions of theft at the time. However, I also found that the lived experiences of robbers and victims did not always match up to the common perceptions. The foundation of my thesis is the disjuncture between perceptions and experience, and what the discrepancies can tell us about the place of crime in London culture.

Crimes in London were prosecuted at the Old Bailey court house during the late eighteenth century. Thefts and violent thefts (which included highway robbery and robbery) made up the largest categories of crimes tried at the Old Bailey during the late
eighteenth century. Out of the 15,379 court cases heard at the Old Bailey Courthouse between 1780 and 1800, 13,789 fell under the categories of theft and violent theft\(^5\) (with theft being the much greater number at 12,706).\(^6\) The courts categorized all thefts and violent thefts as felonies and many different crimes fit into these two categories. The offences and accompanying punishments (which ranged from a fine of one shilling to death) varied depending on the values of the items stolen, and the circumstances surrounding the crime. The crimes tried at that Old Bailey that the law considered less-violent thefts (and therefore carried less severe punishments) included burglary, housebreaking, larceny (grand, simple, and petty), pickpocketing, animal theft, embezzlement, extortion, blackmail, receiving stolen goods, shoplifting, stealing from master, theft from post, theft from a specified place, and miscellaneous thefts. The court used violence (assault) to distinguish robbery and highway robbery from these lesser crimes.\(^7\) In order to avoid confusion, I use specific terms developed and used by the creators of the Old Bailey Online project to describe the categories of crime. For example, I use theft to describe all crimes involving stolen property, while the term violent theft is used only when referring to robbery and highway robberies – all robberies are thefts, but not all thefts are robberies.

\(^5\) These two categories (theft and violent theft), are modern ones created by the creators of the Old Bailey Online project in order to better facilitate categorization and statistical analysis. However, the crimes listed in the categories themselves (larceny, robbery, highway robbery, burglary, etc.) carry the same terms and descriptions that the courts and the people of London used at the end of the eighteenth century.


The stories of crimes told by victims and perpetrators at the Old Bailey also appeared in reports about criminal activities in periodicals throughout the years. Extreme and exceptional criminal activity created sensational highly publicized stories, but in sheer terms of numbers, thefts and robberies in and around the capital dominated the discussion of criminal activity. Public discussions focused on dangers to life and property from the “banditti” in and around London. The media presented London at the end of the eighteenth century engulfed in a growing crime problem, with theft – usually violent – constituting most of that delinquency. This thesis explores the relationship between the perception of robbery and the experiences of robbers and their victims.

The first chapter of the thesis discusses the perceptions of highwayman and footpads. Newspapers portrayed them as violent male criminals who carried out strategically planned robberies in structured gangs. The public image of robbery also depicted a complicated situation in the capital with regards to the crime. Some in the city believed more work needed to be done to change social conditions that created criminal behaviors. However newspapers at the time made it appear as though almost every robber was subject to the same outcome – to be caught and convicted. Ultimately my research suggests that the public feared what robbers accomplished – loss of property and physical violence with perhaps loss of life. This fear overpowered any desire at the time for humanitarian efforts to help solve the problem of robbery.

In chapter two I reconstruct the characteristics of highwaymen and footpads from court records and discuss their experiences with the court. According to my research, robbers appeared to be predominantly, but not exclusively, young men who often operated in gangs. The perceptions reflected the crimes and criminals that appeared in

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the records, but the lived experiences of the robbers also integrated them into the larger community. The robbers developed methods and networks with other Londoners in order to increase their chances of successfully robbing a target and getting away.

I shift the focus in chapter three to the other side of the law to look at the experiences of the victims of robberies in London around the end of the eighteenth century. No one seemed safe from robberies at the time; robbers did not discriminate by class or social status, which may have contributed to Londoners’ fear of highwaymen and footpads. However, the victims of robbery often played an essential role in apprehending and prosecuting the robbers that attacked them.

I employed court records and newspaper stories to identify these trends and to navigate the web of networks that connected robbers to the broader community. The court records are found in the *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*. This database contains the fully searchable, digitized records of the *Old Bailey Proceedings* from 1674 to 1913. In addition to the proceedings, this online database also contains the *Accounts of the Ordinary of Newgate* which provide biographical documents of many of the executed prisoners at the time. These sources contain descriptions of the victims’ and court officials’ attitudes toward robbers. Many of the victims of crimes acted as their own detectives and prosecutors, and their voices appeared prominently in the transcripts of the court cases. However, the exploration of robbery in London at the end of the eighteenth century must also include an analysis of the voices of the accused criminals themselves, and these voices too, are present in the trial transcripts.
The number of court cases I read for this thesis totaled 125. My sampling method involved choosing three years (1780, 1790 and 1800) and I read every court case of robbery from those years. I chose these years to avoid any biases or anomalies that might occur and skew the results (for example due to different months, seasons, or choosing a single year).

The text of the court case records usually followed a similar pattern. The voices of the court (such as judges and jury members) rarely appeared in the records. When present, they usually asked for clarification of what someone said in their testimony, or the court officials (again rarely) may have asked a specific question. Similarly, the voices of counsel – lawyers and attorneys – usually also remained absent from the case records. The primary voices recorded in the transcripts of the court cases came from two groups in particular: the defense and the prosecutor. The accused prisoner that stood on trial many times made up the entirety of the defense while the victim who had property stolen represented the prosecution. The case transcripts opened with the prosecutor...
telling the story of what happened during the robbery. This testimony usually preceded
witness statements that either corroborated or gave an alternate view to the prosecutor’s
account of the crimes. Next came the defense statement, the prisoner’s opportunity to
convince the court of innocence or ask mercy of the court. After the defense, witnesses
for the defense sometimes offered statements to help prove the prisoner’s innocence, or
more frequently, to provide “good character” references. These witnesses explained how
long they had known the prisoner and how the accused had always been an honest and
trustworthy person. The records of the court cases varied greatly in length. Some trials
involved numerous witnesses called in by both sides, while other cases did not last long
at all, such as the trial of George Borrett for highway robbery. The transcript for this case
simply read “there being no evidence to bring the charge home to the prisoner, he was
ACQUITTED.”

For news representations, I used The Times Digital Archive (which contains
digitized copies of The London Times dating from 1785 to 2006). I researched a total of
157 issues of The Times taken randomly from the year 1785 to 1800, in order to dissect
the perceptions of robbery around the end of the eighteenth century.

Newspapers can pose potential problems for researchers. Writers had their own
biases; the paper’s financial backers had their own personal backgrounds and political
affiliations that impact the writing style and even the choice of stories published. On the
other hand, the historian Jerry W. Knudson says that historians may fall prey to relying
on newspapers only as sources of factual information and dismissing anything that is not

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9 Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 23 April 2013), July 1800, trial of GEORGE BORRETT (t18000709-11).
10 I created this sample by searching The Times Digital Archive (http://gale.cengage.co.uk/times.aspx/) for the keywords “theft,” “rob*” and “steal*” for the years 1785 - 1800.
“complete” or “objective.” He states that historians should not only be concerned with what happened, but with what people thought happened. The selection, writing, and editing of the news, whether significant or not, provides insights into the society and culture of those who read it. If contemporary readers believed the news and acted on their beliefs, then the news, no matter if it was completely accurate, can be historically significant. My own research on robbery covered in newspapers looks not only at how newspapers covered the crime, but also what content journalists decided to cover, and what they left out.

**Literature Review**

When I first started research on crime in early modern England, I found one book repeatedly referenced: *Albion’s Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (1975). *Albion* is to crime what E.P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) is to the English Industrial Revolution – it is frequently cited in other works, has influenced the writing of crime history, and provides one of the best overviews of the socio-economic structures and relationships of eighteenth century England. *Albion* contains six individual studies of crime in England during the eighteenth century written during the heyday of British social history in the 1960s and 1970s. The authors of these studies, Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, Cal Winslow, John G. Rule, and E. P. Thompson, had all at one point or another been associated with the Centre for the Study of Social History at the University of Warwick, a significant

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institution in the development of British Marxist and Social History. The book is also a part of the British Marxist historical movement that some of its authors, Thompson especially, championed. The Marxist historical approach has many tenets that come across in *Albion*, including the “history from below” approach, and the concentration on social classes, the dispossessed, and social movements. Hay’s first chapter is concerned with the laws that dealt with crime in general at the time. He argues that these laws, and even acts of pardons, emerged as tools of creating and maintaining class divisions and hierarchies. His second essay extends this analysis by showing how the law dealt with poachers. Peter Linebaugh argues that rioters confronted surgeons at Tyburn in order to get the bodies of their deceased friends and family members back. Except for a minority of surgeons, dissection of these dead bodies seemed less about expanding the knowledge of human anatomy and more about extending capital punishment through mutilation as a show of power. Both Cal Winslow and John G. Rule researched smuggling to show that poorer English people did not view it as illegal, but rather was a legitimate part of local economies and an important part of capitalist reproduction and evolution. Finally, Thompson revisits the Black Act of 1723 (in which capital punishment was extended to poaching as crime) to argue that the legislation came into being to protect excessive exclusivity of property. *Albion* as a whole provides an excellent look at eighteenth century English social relationships mediated by legal structures, and may indeed be

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regarded as one of the seminal bodies of work done on the study of crime in England during the eighteenth century.\footnote{13}{Douglas Hay, et al., \textit{Albion's Fatal Tree : Crime and Society in 18th Century England} (New York: Pantheon Books, Random House, 1975).}

An early critique of \textit{Albion} and its focus on social divisions believed that the authors tended to oversimplify when making arguments about a class basis for criminal legislation. Scholars such as Morton J. Horwitz in \textit{The Yale Law Journal} and Tim Curtis in \textit{Social History} discuss what they saw as oversimplification and reductionism in their reviews of the book, with Curtis actually saying that Hay “brutalizes the argument to summarize it” in the interpretation of the role of law in the eighteenth century as a tool of class preservation.\footnote{14}{Morton J. Horwitz, “The Rule of Law: An Unqualified Human Good?,” review of \textit{Albion’s Fatal Tree} by Douglas Hay et al., \textit{The Yale Law Journal} 86, no. 3 January 1, 1977, 561–566; Curtis, Tim, review of \textit{Albion’s Fatal Tree} by Douglas Hay et al., \textit{Social History} 2, no. 5, May 1, 1977, 671–673. Both journal articles written just two years after the book was published.}

Moreover, most of the crimes that hold center stage in \textit{Albion} appeared to be what the authors refer to in the preface as “good” criminals, or “premature revolutionaries or reformers, forerunners of popular movements - all kinds of rioters, smugglers, poachers, primitive rebels in industry.”\footnote{15}{Douglas Hay, et al., \textit{Albion's Fatal Tree : Crime and Society in 18th Century England} (New York: Pantheon Books, Random House, 1975), 14.} Here Hay makes an assumption about criminal behavior or the motivations that drove the “good” criminals; however he and the other authors do not provide any such interpretations or assumptions about the behavior or motivations driving the criminals they would not classify as “good” – murderers, rapists, and the subject of my thesis: robbers and thieves.

Finally, historical methodologies have expanded beyond the strict Marxist analysis of \textit{Albion}. Two of these developments in particular have relevance to my own research: the cultural turn, and the enhanced researching abilities afforded by the growing...
use of digital resources and databases. Writing about crime after the cultural turn leads to new questions and approaches, and employing methodological approaches set forth by Geertz, Foucault and others, can provide new and alternative insights not present in Albion. Such as: how did the general public discuss criminal activity? What can the way they described criminals tell us about the relationship between the public and criminals?

That said, Albion is not without merit. In addition to the exceptional analysis of the social structures and relationships in eighteenth century England, the methodology that the authors used has provided me with an introduction to interpreting legal data and the legal and political atmosphere of England at the time.

Many scholars have followed in the footsteps of Albion. These studies focus on the social structures and economic history of England; some, but not all, of these works concentrate their study on crime and social structures. However, all of these studies share many common elements mentioned above in the discussion of Albion and provide the same benefits of dissecting the socio-economic structures and elements of society in London at the time.17

16 The cultural turn was a movement to include “culture” in the analyses of social sciences, it involved bringing in methods from disciplines outside of the social sciences such as literary analysis. George Steinmetz, State/Culture: State-Formation after the Cultural Turn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999) pp. 1–2.

My research, in contrast, is aimed at studying robbery as a reflection of the perceptions and interactions that took place in day to day life in London at the time. My study also addresses socio-cultural relationships in two ways. First, it analyzes the permeability of the boundaries between those engaged in robbery and those not engaged in criminal activity at the time. Second, it explores the differences in the ways that the perceptions of robbery and robbers were constructed by members of different classes.

Numerous authors have written histories of crime that analyze the trends and the relationship between changes in the structures of society and the levels and trends in crime rates over time. J. M. Beattie’s Crime and the Courts in England 1660-1800 is one of the most influential of these studies. Beattie argues that English courts transitioned punishment from being public and violent to being more private and aimed at reforming the criminal in “a period in which the foundations of modern forms of judicial administration were laid.” He contends that this shift emerged as part of a transition in general attitudes toward violence. Violence once seemed acceptable, but began to offend public sensibilities. Building upon Michel Foucault’s analysis of the rise of the prison system in Discipline and Punish, Beattie shows that public attitudes shied away from executions and physical punishments and supported instead the imprisonment and mental reformation of prisoners. He also observed this change in the reduction in the number of homicides over the years covered in his research.

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Beattie’s treatment of the crimes themselves has influenced my own research. He focuses on “serious” felonious crimes and groups them into two divisions: offenses against property and offenses against the person. He provides an analysis of crime in Surrey and Sussex while mentioning that London was usually the center of attention when the public discussed crime. His book delivers a starting point when studying how the public perceived crime, but he also states that his work cannot achieve the level of detail that can be obtained by focusing on case studies or a single crime. In this thesis I have taken his suggestion to heart. I provide an overview of structures, trends and perceptions, but instead of focusing on change over a long period of time, I concentrate on details associated with a more nuanced microhistorical study. There have been some studies on specific crimes in England, but none use robbery to analyze the culture of the city and the place of the criminal community in that culture.20

There is also abundant historical research that considers the changing administrative methods of policing, punishment, and criminal legislation. Through reading the work that has been done in this area I look at the way historians interpret changes in the upper class as well as in government and administrative bodies in reaction to changes in criminal activity. One such study is Francis Dodsworth’s “Policing and the Prevention of Crime,” in which he argues that social processes rather than individual theorists shaped perceptions of crime in England in the eighteenth century. Dodsworth observes that men like Henry Fielding and Patrick Colquhoun attempted to prevent the corruption of society by preventing crime, and in the process they displayed a change in the understanding of economics, society, and politics at the time. Fielding and Colquhoun sought to accomplish this transformation by removing temptations into vice. Studies from this perspective usually aim to show how society (in particular the administrative bodies and those in charge of creating and maintaining the structures and rules of England) perceived the criminal community.

In contrast, the interpretation of changes in law, policing and punishments with regards to robbery depict changing perceptions of that crime from those outside it. The transformations in policy also demonstrate what policymakers understood about the motivations behind criminal activities, and the ways that they might change the structures in place in order to decrease the amount of crime.

I draw inspiration in my methodology primarily from the anthropologist Clifford Geertz and the historian Robert Darnton. Geertz defines “culture” and Darnton used that definition to explore multiple events and symbols in French cultural history. Culture, according to Geertz, is a set of accumulated patterns of meanings embodied in the symbols and the ways in which people communicate, perpetuate and develop knowledge of everyday life around them. By analyzing the meanings behind the objects, rituals and symbols shared by a culture, historians can begin to understand the way agents at the time viewed their world. Darnton uses this idea, arguing that there is an intense rigor behind the “anthropological modes of history” even if it may look too much like literature to “hard-boiled” social scientists. The foundation of this rigor is that:

*individual expression takes place within a general idiom, that we learn to classify sensations and make sense of things by thinking within a framework provided by our culture. It is therefore possible for the historian to discover the social dimension of thought and to tease meaning from documents by relating them to the surrounding world of significance,*

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Darnton’s argument for the importance of relating text to context is central to the methodology that I use when interpreting the multiple perceptions of crime. Geertz argues the importance of what he calls thick description or “drawing large conclusions from small, but densely textured facts; to support broad assertions about the role of culture in the construction of collective life by engaging them exactly with complex specifics.” Thick description is an attempt to rectify some of the oversimplification and reductionism that some critics attribute to social history. In this study, I apply this model through examination of individual cases of robbery as an entry in London culture at the end of the eighteenth century. My study also relies on the work of French academic Michel Foucault on the construction and evolution of cultures and “other-ing.” Using Foucault as a model, I analyze the ways that distinctions were made between the general public in London and robbers – a group of people seen as “others” by the larger culture surrounding them. For example, distinguishing robbers as “idle” and different from honest hard working Londoners.

To be sure, these approaches pose the danger of what historian John Tosh discusses as “symbolic overloading” or attempting to read too much into a single source and attribute findings to a source that are not actually there. In an attempt to combat that potential pitfall, I acknowledge, as Tosh, Geertz and Darnton do, the limitations of the interpretative procedures. A document can be interpreted differently by different

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26 Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish.
people; my interpretation is just another layer in the layers of interpretation of robbery in London. My thesis attempts to include the benefits of both social and cultural history in that I analyze the trends and structures that can be observed from the “outside” as well as attempt to look at the world through the eyes of the people whose lives make up the tales explored in my research.

Studies of criminology and theories of crime have also helped to shape my research. Modern explanations for criminal behavior typically fall into three categories: biological, psychological, and sociological; and the appropriately titled Theories of Crime, edited by Ian Marsh, provides an excellent overview and introduction to these theories.28 Criminal activities likely stem from a combination of these factors. The discrete factors, however, provide insights into motivations and explanations behind robbery in London at the time. In particular, the Chicago School and sociological theories of criminal behavior appear most relevant to my own study. These theories emphasize that delinquency and delinquents cannot be understood without situating them in their specific social environment. The Chicago School posits that crime does not take place as an individual act but as a social one, and that in dangerous neighborhoods crime becomes an expected and normal response to residents’ surroundings.

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), too, remains an important sociological theorist of crime. He claimed that the publishing of crime news and the punishing of criminal behavior created social continuity. The crime acts themselves did less to draw the public

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28 Ian Marsh, ed., Theories of Crime (London; New York: Routledge, 2006). This book has been the most informative on my introduction to studies done on criminology and however two other books have also been helpful: Barry S. Gedfrey, Stephen Farrall, and David J. Cox, Criminal Lives: Family Life, Employment, and Offending (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Jock Young, The Exclusive Society: Social Exclusion, Crime and Difference in Late Modernity (Sage Publications Ltd, 1999).
Durkheim’s views shaped my focus on the significance of perceptions of crime in eighteenth century London. My work, however, also suggests that criminal activity flourished in neighborhood networks; these networks, in turn, opened a space for perpetuation of criminal behavior.

The emphasis on situating crime and criminals within social settings would be at home with the sort of research done by the authors of *Albion’s Fatal Tree* and other social histories of crime. My methodology emphasizes the importance of situating crime in its contextual environment. I test the argument that crime can be seen as a “normal” or “expected” act in response to life in certain neighborhoods in my analysis of London at the time by examining the locations of where robberies occurred. While some neighborhoods experienced a higher concentration of robberies, robberies occurred throughout the capital; therefore, social environment was a factor that contributed to crime rates at the end of the eighteenth century, but not the sole determining factor.

In order to provide insight into the environments and networks within which robberies transpired, I looked into historical studies that describe the social relations and the lives of Londoners. These works do not concentrate their research on crime – some do not even discuss it – and they vary in their individual focus, but all share a common thread of addressing life in London in the eighteenth century. For example, Peter Clark’s *The English Alehouse* analyzes the development of alehouses, inns and taverns from 1200 to 1830, situating them in the shifting social structures in England. He argues that the key to their social longevity stemmed from their ability to maintain “both a striking consistency in its institutional parameters and yet it can adapt relatively quickly to new conditions and new local situations,” and the rise in working class living standards after

1850 became crucial to the long term prosperity of English drinking establishments.\(^{30}\)

Social institutions such as alehouses were social nodes in local communities, and places where criminals interacted with other Londoners.

Another study that informed my work, A. Roger Ekirch’s *At Day’s Close: Nights in Times Past*, provides an in-depth study of the way people lived their lives during the night in pre-industrial times. Ekirch argues that rather than being simply the backdrop of a break in a day or the forgotten time for sleep, nighttime in the early modern age “embodied a distinct culture, with many of its own customs and rituals.” Some of these customs and rituals shaped both perceptions and lived experiences of crime in the eighteenth century.\(^{31}\)

I use these and other social studies to provide the context for a study of robbery. \(^{32}\)

The pictures these authors have painted allow me to explore the complex social,


economic, and cultural network of relationships in London during the last two decades of the eighteenth century. I focus this exploration on the place of robbery in everyday life and its impact on these complex webs of relationships. My study of theft also allows me to address and test some of these conclusions about London society that do not take crime into consideration. Such as Clark’s assertions that alehouses provided “a focal point for a matrix of economic, social and cultural activities;” they established hubs of complex networks of relationships. My research into robbery in London during the last two decades of the eighteenth century substantiates this claim, and demonstrates how these networks also connected Londoners to criminals and criminal activity.

**Significance and Pitfalls**

My study of robbery is a multifaceted view of perceptions as well as socio-cultural relationships. Together these approaches show that robbery provided an avenue to procure fortunes for those individuals who engaged in it, and generated fear in those who did not. This fear, in turn, played a crucial role in shaping perceptions and responses to criminal activity.

Four reasons emerged throughout my research that demonstrate why a study of robbery in London at the end of the eighteenth century is significant. First, as the historiography shows, a concentration on the subject of robbery has been neglected by students of crime and everyday life. Several studies of crime in England tend to focus on

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“social crimes” such as poaching and riots, behaviors that may not have been seen as a crime at the time by the lower class of the population and thus were sometimes used as an instrument of class conflict. Others, by contrast, provide broad overviews of numerous crimes. My research focuses on robbery, a crime which was manifestly a crime in the view of the public.

Another area of significance stems from the way that robbery as a crime blurred class boundaries and consequently allows us to look at class from a new perspective. The victims of robbery on the streets of London were not limited to specific social classes or demographic groups; therefore, robbery provides a vantage point that crosses class boundaries of life in London in the late eighteenth century. At the same time, the frequency of the discussion of robbery in newspapers, broadsides, and other sources demonstrates Londoners were preoccupied with crime, and especially with the crime of robbery.

The significance of this thesis also lies in the way that I conceptualize robbery as the basis for a “culture” of people who existed apart from yet in relation to the general public. The robbers separated themselves by not “following the rules” and breaking from the social order (in this case the laws) the public followed. My thesis questions the degree to which robbery as a crime gave coherence to this culture. The approach suggests a need to look into similar cultures that appeared to exist outside the laws and structures that members of the mainstream public chose to follow and rely on. Cultures such as the Romani, or those surrounding communes, hermits, or other peoples that the

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34 One notable exception is Lucy Moore, *The Thieves Opera* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1997). While Moore’s book provides some fascinating insights into the criminal world of the early 18th century including thefts and robberies, her book is primarily a dual biography of two extraordinary – in the most literal sense of the word – cases of criminal activity in London, which she acknowledges in her introduction.
general public perceived as separate from themselves. The public in London saw robbers as separate because they did not follow the rules and regulations set forth and followed by the majority of mainstream society. Likewise, other studies can examine how views of these perceived distinct groups lined up with experiences.

Finally, the methodological approach of my research demonstrates ways of bringing together historical data using newer digital technologies. All of the research for this thesis was done using online databases. While some of these databases required subscriptions through an institution, projects like the Old Bailey Online, London Lives and Locating London, provide free and open database environments for research. These examples demonstrate how widely available digital resources can contribute to the growing historical conversation, by providing access to researchers who may not otherwise have the ability to explore brick and motor archives.

Despite the immense amount of sources available online, there are limitations posed by the court and newspaper documents as sources for studying crime. Due to logistical and practicality issues, I did all of my research from the United States. I did not have enough time or resources to go to the archives in London in order to find documents that have not been digitized yet or personal journals and written documents that exist in smaller archives that do not yet have the resources to make their sources available digitally to the public. In the future, further research into these smaller archives may help to fill in some of the blanks and create an even larger and more substantial body of primary sources about robbery from which to draw data.

In addition to the limitations created by only researching online databases, the cases reflected in court records only represent the instances where crimes ended with the
apprehension of the alleged criminals and a trial. Therefore, a study of crime will never encompass a complete study of all the criminal activity that took place. The criminals that escaped arrest – either by having been very successful in their chosen way of life, or through pure chance – managed to keep their criminal activity (and their stories) out of the courts, newspapers and history books. I acknowledge this fact – I am not claiming to have studied every case of robbery ever committed in London at this time. To combat this problem, I have attempted to create a large sample of crime by using court records as well as newspaper articles and posted reports of robberies.

Robbery, provides one of the best gauges of the criminal culture of London at the time. It included both amateur and professional criminals, it could have involved brutal violence or simply the threat of danger, it could have been spontaneous or utilized extensive planning, and it could have been perpetrated by a single person or by gangs. This broad variation in the people and methods of robbery help to avoid the pitfalls of bias that could occur by looking at other particular types of crime.

Conclusion

In conclusion, my thesis is a socio-cultural study of robbery in London from 1780 to 1800 that looks at the perceptions and interactions that took place between the people involved in robbery and Londoners not involved in crime at the time. Londoners in the capital saw robbery as a very significant criminal threat to the public at the time. Their perceptions centered on a fear of robbers whom they viewed as violent male criminals that operated in organized units, viciously attacking their victims.
My research describes how, according to court records, robbers appeared to in fact be predominantly young males who used violence in the course of their crime. Robbers interacted with networks that connected them to both other criminals and Londoners who did not engage in criminal activity at the time. Therefore, my thesis contributes to the historical conversation of interpretations of the relationships and interactions that made up everyday life in the capital in the late eighteenth century.

The victims of robberies did not seem to be limited to specific social classes or demographic groups; robbery was a crime that stretched across and blurred class boundaries. Londoners viewed robbery as a severe threat to the city, and the reactions to the crime echoed this fear. However, the robbed, and other nearby Londoners, usually changed the dynamic of the relationship with their attackers after the robberies and became key players in the apprehension and prosecution of robbers at the time. This thesis explores these issues primarily through an analysis of court records and newspapers.
No Sympathy for the Devil

Dick Turpin, a notorious highwayman who died in 1739, riding his horse Black Bess, from a Victorian era toy theater. Toy theaters were tiny theaters with stylized paper or wood cut-out actors that presented popular stories to an audience of both children and adults. The audience of this toy theater saw the cut-out of Turpin in the act of firing a pistol. The theater focused on the violent aspect of highwaymen, a common view in London at the time. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons. [public domain]
Late on the evening of Wednesday, the fourth of September, 1782, Reverend Dr. Martin was robbed as he returned to London with his wife and three children while they travelled through Finchley Common. The story of the Martins’ experience appeared in a broadside printed shortly after the crime, and the author stated that the robbers behaved with “the utmost rudeness and brutality.” Like many similar rural areas just outside of London, Finchley Common was intimately connected with the expansion of the city during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Common lands such as Finchley Common, were privately owned either collectively or by a single person. However, people who did not own it still held traditional rights to use the land: for example, to gather firewood or let their livestock graze freely. A large number of people like the Martin family traveled through or used these lands for various purposes day or night. For many Londoners, including the Martins, the visit to Finchley Common, resulted in a robbery.

As the reverend and his family travelled through Finchley Common, a gang of eight or nine footpads stopped them on the road. The footpads, muggers and robbers who robbed on foot and preyed upon pedestrians, approached the family with their pistols and cutlasses drawn. The family footman tried to protect the Martins, but he was shot by one of the robbers and died on the spot. The doctor, awestruck by the immediate murder of his servant, fumbled for the property demanded by the gang. At least one of the robbers

grew impatient and hacked at the reverend’s knee with a cutlass. The author of the report insisted that the footpads “behaved with the utmost Rudeness and Brutality.”

The youngest child, a four year old girl frightened by the violence, began to scream. One of the gang members silenced her with the “most horrid imprecations,” fired his pistol and lodged several slugs into the child’s head. The robbers also took watches, money, and even their shoe-buckles, and left the doctor and his wife emotionally scarred and “distracted ever since.” The printed notice on which that contained this account stated that “the utmost Industry has be used to discover the Murderers, but hitherto without Effect.”

The author of the broadside called this story one “several audacious Robberies and inhuman Murders lately committed,” and stated that the streets of London have become “infested with every sort of villains.” This villainous plague, the author argued, came about in part from criminals who committed minor crimes and were then sentenced to hard labor in places that functioned as “seminaries of vice.” When not working, guards shackled the prisoners in the “hulks” (large ships left in dock in the Thames River). Many of London’s convicted served their sentence on ballast-lighters or dredgers anchored on the Thames. For

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37 “ACCOUNT of the most audacious ROBBERY and inhuman MURDERS, committed by a Gang of Footpads, on the Person and Family of the Rev. Dr. Martin.” Exon : Printed by T.Brice, Goldsmiths'-Street, 1782. (Broadside).
convicted criminals incarceration often provided an education into techniques for robbery and fraud. The author of the chronicle of Dr. Martin and his family argued that as soon as the sentence was served the robbers returned to London to “put their villainous schemes into execution.”

This account, and the author’s arguments that accompanied it, exemplifies the perceptions of robberies and robbers held by Londoners at the end of the eighteenth century. This chapter focuses on how a culture of robbery was perceived, constructed, and defined in English urban culture – Londoners living in the capital who did not engage in criminal activities. I discuss the growing awareness that crime and robbery in particular was a problem for those living in the capital. I look at how boundaries were constructed between robbers and those Londoners not engaged in criminal activity. Perceptions of crime appeared throughout newspaper articles covering robberies in and around London, as well as broadsides like the one about Dr. Martin’s trials in Finchley Common.

While the biases of the editors and writers are always present, when read as a mirror for public opinion, newspapers still provide historians key insights into how their contemporaries viewed their world. Robert Harris in his analysis of mid-eighteenth century English newspapers argues that the press played a “vigorous and important” role in politics, and as a link between the world of parliament and the world of taverns and clubs. This link existed because the authors of the press articles reflected public opinion.

38 Ibid.
Moreover, the press operated as a business enterprise. The newspaper business was, after all, a business, and while it may be oversimplifying – and perhaps overestimating – their role to say they were simply a perfect reflection of an all-encompassing “public opinion,” they certainly needed to appeal to a broad audience in order to make money. That need to appeal means the press can reveal popular feelings about crime and robbery in London at the end of the eighteenth century. On the other hand, newspapers also provided a medium for shaping public opinion through editorials and the selection of what content to publish. Therefore, newspapers in London at the time acted as both an agent and a mirror of public perceptions.

The newspaper articles used for this study come from The London Times. The Times was first published in January 1785 under the name The Daily Universal Register. The newspaper was written anonymously and had a reputation for avoiding sensationalism. According to a history of the newspaper, written in the same tradition of anonymity, it also changed in its formative years from a “marketable means of publicity” for its advertisers to an “independent organ of public opinion.”

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40 These articles were digitized and the digital archive they came from was The Times Digital Archive which contains fully word searchable, full page scans of the times.
The *Times* typically reported on robberies three ways. First, and most common, were reports from the Bow Street Magistrate Office or accounts of trials at the Old Bailey. Secondly, robberies made their way into newspapers were classified ads placed by the victims. These ads told what had happened and asked for assistance in the aid of bringing the perpetrators to justice and recovering lost property. The third primary way *The Times* authors reported on robberies came in the form of stories, similar to the broadside about Dr. Martin, which gave detailed and sensational coverage of crimes on the streets of the capital. Articles on robbery usually showed up in two parts of the paper: on a general news page alongside articles about domestic and foreign news stories, political issues, weddings, deaths, and market news; or on a page with classified ads requesting or selling a multitude of items ranging from produce to lodgings for lease.

The placement of the press coverage on robbery reflected the status of robbery in London. First, the placement of the reports suggested an integration of crime, and in particular robbery, with the everyday affairs of Londoners. Stories about robbery appeared on general news pages along with stories about entertainment at local theaters as well as marriages and deaths that occurred in city. Second, the coverage of robberies in classified ads suggested the business aspect of the crime. The offering of rewards for the recovery of stolen items or help bringing to justice those responsible for the robbery became a potential business transaction; just like the other ads posted alongside it, such as those for the sale of imported items on a recently arrived trading ship.

Newspapers, however, are not the only source of perceptions on robbery analyzed in this chapter. The conversation about robbery also took place in books and pamphlets written by political and administrative figures. These authors brought with them the

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42 “Robbery,” *The Times*, February 01, 1788, 3.
biases and concerns of the upper class elite. Moreover, stories of infamous robbers’ lives and trials were published as broadsides or books for public consumption. This chapter draws from all of these sources in order to explore the identities attached to robbers, their victims, and the crime itself, in the public mind.

This conversation represented robbers as career criminals, who worked in gangs, were quick to resort violence, showed no remorse in their use of it, and took anything they could get their hands on. Robbers were viewed as cold and calculating with no qualms about doing whatever it took, and who were not worried about who they attacked, in order to secure their next score. The administrative and political elite portrayed the footpads and highwaymen as predominantly poor, idle men who would relieve wealthy Londoners of their money and watches. Rather than honest work, robbers took what they needed or what they wanted. In contrast to the authors of these stories, robbers held in contempt class differences and the value of labor.

**The Reign of Robbery**

Citizens of the capital believed that robbery constituted a major threat to Londoners’ way of life, with the potential to expand and engulf the city. The public perceived a crime wave with robbery taking a lead in this conversation. Newspapers covered stories of robberies in much greater detail than other less violent crimes. The authors placed more importance on stories of robberies and they believed their audience wanted to hear more about these stories than other crimes. For example, on Thursday, January 10, 1788 an article appeared in *The Times* that covered two recent highway
robberies and two burglaries. The coverage of highway robberies took up eleven paragraphs and the burglaries only receiving one sentence each (just covering the indictments and verdicts). Highwaymen and footpads tormented the city like a scourge – something not a part of the natural order of life in London that needed to be exorcised.

The public viewed robbery as an enormous threat to the people of London – their lives and their property – at the end of the eighteenth century. The author of an article that appeared in *The Times* on Saturday, March 24, 1792 reported on recent robberies that took place in Italy and the administrative response. The journalist took time to discuss how great of a problem robbery posed to their own city. “The rage of robbing, which for a considerable time has reigned, like an epidemical disease, in this city and its avenues, call aloud on the legislature to devise some mode of efficacious protection for the lives and property of the people.”

This quote from the author demonstrates a key perception of the crime of robbery itself: that highwaymen and footpads were rampant on the streets of London around the end of eighteenth century.

Perceptions of highwaymen and footpads in newspapers also captured some of Londoners’ frustrations with current methods of preventing crime. An anonymously published article in *The Times* from the fourteenth of October 1789, stated that an “army of desperate thieves”... “infest the avenues” of the city, and at night they committed daring felonies openly in the street nearly every moment. Another article printed on Friday, December 30, 1791 echoed this viewpoint. The author stated that “scarce a night passes without some footpad or highway depredations in and about this great metropolis. And this proves the present activity of justices is a farce, and their thief-taking

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43 *The Times*, Friday October 21 1785, 3.
44 “Of the Police of our Public Streets,” *The Times*, October 14, 1789.
This article not only stressed the threat of footpads and highwaymen on London, but proclaimed that present measures did not sufficiently deal with this threat. Another article reiterated this belief, when the authors detailed a robbery that occurred in the middle of the day, declaring that “such notorious practices at noon-day are a disgrace to the Police of this City, and we hope that the Magistrates of the above Ward [where the robbery happened – around St. Andrews Church] only wait to be informed of them to apply the remedy.”

In *The New Cheats of London Exposed*, Richard King, Esq. contended that the proliferation of robbery in and around London amounted “to the disgrace of humanity, sense, and religion, the dishonour of this once flourishing kingdom, and the scoff and ridicule of our neighbours the French and Germans.” King stated in the book that he based his arguments on personal experiences and observations of life in London. He argued that more robberies and general crimes happened in London in one week than were found in ancient Rome over the course of a whole year. London had become more and more luxurious and that “luxury begets dissipation” (debauchery and indulgences) which led to the vices and evils, such as robbery, that plagued the city. Hewling Luson, author of *Inferior Politics*, also discussed the “alarming increase of robberies, in and near the Metropolis.” These authors all wrote about their opinions on the causes of, and remedies for, robbery, but they all stemmed from the same cornerstone: that

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46 “Robberies,” *The Times*, Friday, December 30, 1791, 4.
47 *The Times*, Saturday, Mar 24, 1792, 3.
highwaymen and footpads posed a very significant risk to the people living in the capital, and the methods undertaken to prevent robbery so far proved insufficient.

Despite the reign of terror by footpads and highwaymen, stories suggested that robbers did not get away with their crimes. The press shaped Londoners’ perceptions of robberies by portraying the inevitability of capture and punishment in their writings and newspaper articles. This attitude emerged from the choice of stories the press covered or did not write. In almost every instance where the press wrote about robberies, the highwayman or footpad was found guilty. These stories served as both a reassurance to the public and a caution to robbers.

In newspaper summaries of court cases, the article usually ended with a simple line of “the prisoner was found guilty” or “the jury immediately found him guilty.” Typically the authors of these newspaper articles stated the guilt of robbers in newspapers very matter-of-factly, as if they declared of course the criminal was caught and found guilty. Occasionally the authors left out any mention of the sentencing of these convicted criminals, but a robber almost never appeared to be innocent in newspapers. In books and pamphlets published at the time, a similar pattern emerged. The authors focused on guilty verdicts and an almost complete absence of innocent robbers on trial seemed to create a reassuring perception to the public that all robbers would inevitably be caught, tried in court, and found guilty. These stories also served as a discouraging stereotype to any who would consider the life of a footman or highwayman. The authors cautioned that as enticing as the life of a robber may have appeared, it always ended in ruin.

**Violence in the Streets**
The fear about the number of robberies in London at that time arose because it was not just the theft of property that worried them, but that the public was not safe from the violence of robbers. The robbery of Dr. Martin exhibited an extreme use of violence in the course of a robbery by a gang of footpads. While that incident exemplified extreme violence, the images of robbers, both highwaymen and footpads, generally portrayed them as inherently violent—ruthless villains. A stereotype surrounded robbers as quick to use violence to claim their prize with no remorse or nary or second thought.

The perception of robbers as violent that generated this fear stemmed from the definitions of the terms that the public used to describe them. A colloquial term, “footpad” literally meant a robber who robs on foot. A definition of the term showed up in Nathan Bailey’s “A Collection of the Canting Words” from his 1737 *The Universal Etymological English Dictionary*. He defined a footpad as:

*FOOT-pads, or LOW Pads; a Crew of Villains, who rob on Foot, some of them using long Poles or Staves, with an Iron Hook at the End, with which they either pull Gentlemen from their Horses, or knock them down: At other Times, they skulk under Hedges or behind Banks in the Road, and suddenly starting out from their Covert, one seizes the Bridle, while the other dismounts the Passenger: and so rob, and often murder him.*

Likewise, the definition for “highwayman” read:

*HIGH-PADS, Highway-men or Bully-Ruffians; an Order of Villains, and the boldest of all others. Before they commence, they furnish themselves, with good Horses, Swords, Pistols, &c. and sometimes singly, but mostly in Company, commit their execrable Robberies. They have a Vizor-Mask, and two or three Perukes [wigs] of different Colours and Make, the better to conceal themselves. When they meet a Prize upon the Road, they have a Watch-Word, among them, which is no sooner pronounced, but every one falls on. It is usually the Rule among them, that the strongest and bold*

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seize first; the Weaker generally bid stand, and fall in afterwards as Occasion requires. The Instructions given them are, to catch the Bridle in the Left-Hand, and to have the Sword or Pistol in the Right, and, if Opposition be made, or they are likely to be overpowered to kill as fast as they can, and then, either with Booty or without, to make off with all Expedition; and if they are pursued by an Hue or Cry, to conceal themselves in some By place, and let it pass by them.

Both of the “pads” shared the title of villains, and Bailey’s dictionary went so far as to state that footpads “often murder” their victim. Before they finished off their prey, they hooked and pulled the Gentlemen from their horses, or simply knocked down their victim if they were on foot. Highwaymen held the distinction of the “boldest of all others,” armed and prepared to harm their victims with swords and pistols, they would “kill as fast as they can” if they found themselves in danger of being thwarted.

Violence without remorse appeared as a common theme, revisited time and time again in newspapers stories. A Times reporter emphasized the brutality of robbers in his account of what happened to a customs collector named J. B. Norton, Esq. Returning home from a visit with his brother-in-law, two men accosted Norton as he passed through a field. The two robbers began by rifling through Norton’s pockets, and took everything they could find. Not content with stealing his possessions, the reporter stressed that the two men beat him and “otherwise ill treated him,” until they believed that they had killed him. Then, according to the authors of the articles, the footpads threw him in a ditch and left him, where Norton remained in the ditch until five o’clock the next morning when a pair of sailors came upon him and tried to help. Norton failed to tell the two men what had happened to him before he succumbed to his wounds a few hours later.

When Norton’s handkerchief – identified by his initials on it – turned up the following morning in a Westminster Militia camp, suspicion mounted against members
of this regiment. Further evidence appeared when a private placed a knife that belonged to Norton for sale. Officials arrested a drummer in the regiment and the private who attempted to sell the knife, both of whom were under the age of twenty. During an interrogation, the drummer turned on his partner and confessed that the private had killed Norton to prevent him from talking. He explained that the private pummeled Norton about the head, then grabbed his throat, strangled him, and flung him in the ditch.  

This story highlighted the violence of the footpads.

Articles about robbery showed that even when robberies did not end in death, violence remained the key weapon in the robber’s arsenal. In another Times article, as a man travelled along the streets of London, another man struck him over the head with a bludgeon and two men dragged him down Parker Lane. One of the robbers fought with the man over his hat and tried to force him into a house. The victim finally released his hat and fled the house, but the robbers pursued him, and eight more members of their gang joined the chase, armed with cutlasses. The newspaper made sure to include that the victim cried out “lord have mercy me,” and then in a seemingly godless act, the footpads assaulted the

Fig. 7
A flintlock pistol [top], and cutlass sword [bottom], along with the bludgeon, or club, were common weapons used by robbers. Silex pistol [top] of the Revolutionary Wars, made by Ateliers Nationaux in France circa 1790-1795. On display at Morges military museum, access number MMV 1004693. An example of a cutlass, the bottom picture is a cutlass used by the French Navy in the early nineteenth century, housed in the Musée de la Marine de Paris. Images by Rama under the CeCILL (Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 France License), and courtesy of the Wikimedia Commons [fair use].

51 “Robbery and Murder,” The Times, Friday, October 23, 1795, 4.
god-fearing man, bashed him about the head, arms and sides with their bludgeons. The author of this article perpetuated the ascribed identity of robbers as viciously violent by portraying them as barbaric when they did not show mercy on a poor Londoner who begged God for mercy.

Larcenies accounted for the most common offence found in the Old Bailey Proceedings, but interest was reserved for crimes that included violence. The final sentence of this newspaper article covering the robbery of the man on Parker Lane calmly concludes that “several other prisoners [at the Old Bailey Courthouse that day] were convicted of larcenies, but none of a nature sufficiently interesting to merit insertion.”

Larceny involved the theft of goods valued at one shilling or more, but “without any aggravating circumstances” including assault, breaking and entering, stealing “privately” or taking from a series of specified locations such as house. The writers reported on sensational murders and robberies more than on simple cases of stealing goods from a person by pick-pocketing, shop-lifting, or stealing from a place of employment, even though these crimes accounted for far more of the crimes tried at the Old Bailey. In order to attract readers, the press recounted stories of sensational robberies more than other crimes. By emphasizing these reports, the press not only shaped a perception that robberies occurred frequently in the capital, they also which reinforced the fear generated by the perception of robbers’ reign of terror on the streets of London at the time. Conversely, these authors of these stories also perpetuated the focus of the public conversation about crime on robbery.

52 “Saturday, Feb. 27, Highway Robbery, Before Mr. Baron Thompson,” The Times, Monday, March 01, 1790, 3.
Fear, brought on by violence, elevated robbery and highway robbery to a different level of crime from other larcenies, and marked the robber as a different sort of criminal, from the numerous other varieties of theft tried at the Old Bailey. Highway robbery simply distinguished itself from robbery by the added circumstance of having the crime committed on one of the king’s highway. The propensity to accentuate violence as part of robbery, as in these press stories, likely stemmed in part from the very legal definition of the word. Several contemporary works, in addition to seventeenth century English jurist and politician Sir Edward Coke’s dictionary, used violence as part of the legal definition of robbery. Coke wrote that the legal term *robbery* derived from ancient times when the robber would take from a “true man” some of his robes or garments, and also took his money or other goods from or out of some part of his robes. In a 1797 book outlining the laws and legal institutions of England, *robbery* stood out “in law to be amongst the most heinous felonies.” For legal purposes, the law defined *robbery* as “a felony by the common law, committed by a violent assault, upon the person of another, by putting him in fear, and taking from his person his money or other goods of any value whatsoever.”

Judges consequently made the violence in robberies a focal point in their comments reported on in newspaper summaries of court cases. In the previously mentioned case of the robbery that took place on Parker Lane, the robbers only made off with a hat worth one shilling and six pence. The judge, Mr. Baron Thompson, said the

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55 A quick note on my understanding of the value of money, it has come from looking at multiple sources, but I found the best quick summary of it in Lucy Moore’s *The Thieves Opera*, and so I will reiterate it here.
value of the goods “was out of the question, for one half-penny was the same as 100 [pounds].” Thompson stated that whether or not the robbers violently took the man’s possessions, was important to the case, and the jury needed to concern itself first and foremost with this facet of the case. In another case, a man stood on trial for a highway robbery where he snatched an umbrella from a woman. Mr. Justice Buller, the judge presiding over the case, said the case embodied “a nice distinction from highway robbery.” He said that perhaps eighty years ago this may have been tried as a highway robbery, however, in their “modern” times the courts had a more precise understanding of the law. Buller said that “there must be some violence used by the thief, independent of the mere act of taking the thing from their owner,” and in this case the mere snatching of the umbrella was not violent enough, and did not amount to the crime of robbery, and the man was only convicted guilty of stealing.

The public perception of highwaymen and footpads as bloodthirsty bandits presented itself in multiple forums. The press, such as the authors of *The Times*, concentrated their articles on fear inducing and attention-grabbing stories about ferocious robbers, and invoked terror in the reading public. Likewise, the legal definition as well as upper class and administrative conversation on robbery, from men such Justice Buller, highlighted violence as the distinguishing factor that separated it from other thefts.

She summarized that twelve pence (d.) equaled one shilling (s.); a groat was 4d.; a crown was 5s.; a half-crown was 2s. 6d.; a mark was 13s. 4d.; a guinea 21s; and finally a moidore was 27s. Moore went on to explain the value of goods in the eighteenth century, and stated that in the eighteenth century a shilling was worth approximately ten pounds in today’s money (or approximately $16.02 as of November 26, 2012). She said that this may be a bit overgenerous, but the standard of living was much lower then and access to money and goods was concentrated in a small portion of the population. She finished by explaining that a skilled laborer (i.e., tailor or carpenter) made around 20s. each week, an unskilled laborer may make half of that, and that a pound of bread at the time cost between 1 and 2 pence. Lucy More, *The Thieves Opera: The Mesmerizing Story of Two Notorious Criminals in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Viking, 1997), ix.

56 “Saturday, Feb. 27, Highway Robbery, Before Mr. Baron Thompson,” *The Times*, Monday, March 01, 1790, 3.
Everywhere they looked the reading public (and those who had news read to them) saw the robbery “epidemic” as an experience of violence.

**Crew of Villains**

The third characteristic of the public image of robbery centered on gang activity. Nathan Bailey’s definition of footpads began with the phrase “a crew of villains,” and the press accentuated this definition. Newspapers filled public opinion with the perception that robbers, both footpads and highwaymen, operated in gangs on the streets of London in the eighteenth century. The discussion of these gangs portrayed them as an organized crew, a calculating fraternity of career criminals whose members had different responsibilities in order to create and maintain an efficient and effective criminal enterprise. Multiple robbers put limits on victims’ abilities to defend themselves and their family.

One of the key contemporary criminal theorists at the time, Patrick Colquhoun observed that “no uncommon thing for the more daring and strong-minded to form themselves into gangs or societies.” A Scotsman and the principle magistrate of the Queens Square Police Office, Colquhoun became one of the founders of the Thames River Police in 1798, one of the precursors to the modern London Metropolitan Police Force. Colquhoun
argued extensively on the importance of preventative policing measures in his works including *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*. This grouping into a fraternity intended to exclude those who may not have had the stomach to do what it took to secure their bounty, or those who may give up their accomplices if they are apprehended. The common steps that Colquhoun observed robberies occurred through included:

“opportunities are watched, and intelligence procured with a degree of vigilance similar to that which marks the conduct of a skillful general eager to obtain an advantage over an enemy.”⁵⁷ Colquhoun described the gangs as more than just groups of bandits who attacked people at whimsy. According to him, highwaymen exhibited the same “generalship” as the police or military; they meticulously planned attacks, observed patrols, gathered information on potential targets and their valuables, and finally attacked and robbed them.⁵⁸

Many of his contemporaries shared the perception of robbers, both footpads and highwaymen, as having operated primarily in organized gangs. One example of a circulated story of an organized gang of robbers, is a book that detailed the account of a robbery from the year 1800 – a robbery which the authors proclaimed had “strongly excited the public attention.”⁵⁹ The authors began their retelling of the robbery as Mr. Cambell, a simple London banker’s clerk, travelled to a house in Hatton Garden in order to collect the payment of a bill. As he knocked on the door of a “reputable looking”

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⁵⁷ Patrick Colquhon, *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis, Explaining the Various Crime and Misdemeanors which at Present are felt as a Pressure upon the Community; and Suggesting Remedies for their Prevention. By a Magistrate* (London, 1796) 94-95.
⁵⁸ Ibid.,
⁵⁹ *A Full and Particular Account of the Most Extraordinary Robbery of Mr. Cambell, the banker’s clerk, in Hatton-Garden. Giving an Account how Cruelly he was treated by a Gang of Swindlers, with all the Particulars of this Surprising Robbery, which is now Discovered by one of the Gang, Named Lawrence Jones, who was Apprehended on Monday Last by Jealous and Kennedy, in Bridge-Street, Westminster* (London, 1800) Eighteenth Century Collections Online, Gale, 2.
house around noon that day, he was greeted by a gentleman who invited Cambell to follow him to the counting house (which was a room, office, or building where accounting was done and the accounts and monies belonging to a person or business were kept, also known as a compting house\(^60\)). As they reached their destination another man came up behind Cambell and sprang the trap. They covered Campbell’s face with a thick cap so he could not identify them and threw him on the floor. The writer made sure to specify that the entire “scheme concerted before by the villains” involved “hiring” the house and setting in the motion the whole plan of getting Cambell to come to the house to collect payment for a bill. The authors of this book wanted their readers to know that even any “reputable looking” house could have been part of an elaborate plan hatched by a gang of robbers. Tricksters were everywhere, bent on accosting honest businessmen.

As the other members of the gang joined the scene, Cambell lay on the floor wrapped up in green baize, the felt-like woolen cloth that usually covers modern billiard and casino card tables. Now joined by even more robbers, the full strength of the gang proceeded to beat him. After this assault they dragged Cambell down stairs, and then took his pocket book which contained bank notes and bills that totaled around 900 pounds. After they relieved Cambell of his money, they chained his hands and feet to the copper bars of a gate in the kitchen and told him if he made a sound they would “blow his brains out.” They left food sitting in the kitchen but left Cambell so terrified he recalled “had little appetite,” and could not muster enough courage to cry for help for over eight hours. After he finally began to cry out, a man who was working at a house nearby heard

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him and came to help. Campbell’s story showed the terror that these gangs of robbers created even when they did not kill their victims.

In press reporting, stories such as the robbery of Mr. Cambell perpetuated the perception that robbers were not one time offenders, and they were not amateurs. Just as violence was perceived as an inherent trait of robbers, so was career criminality. In press stories about robberies, highwaymen and footpads had no occupation beyond crime.

In addition to providing no description of honest work, the press also reported on robbers convicted of multiple robberies at once, both of which contributed to image of robbers as repeat offenders. An example of this reporting occurred when some of the “Bow Street Runners,” forerunners of London’s modern police force, brought two highway robbers before the sitting magistrates at the Bow Street Office on the Monday, the seventh of October 1788. The press often reported on the “Runners” and their clashes with robbers and other criminals.

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61 A Full and Particular Account of the Most Extraordinary Robbery of Mr. Cambell (1800), 2-5.
The day that runners brought Joshua Softley and John Barret in to the office at Bow Street numerous gentlemen, all of whom had been robbed over the course of the previous summer, showed up to identify the two prisoners as their attackers. The first man, Mr. Dam – a foreigner – said the highwayman came upon him, shoved a pistol in his chest and muttered “your money or your life,” a common saying among robbers at that time. The gentleman gave the robber a guinea, and when that was not enough he also parted with his watch. The next man, Mr. Bonner, said that as he travelled along Finchley Common in a horse-drawn carriage the two prisoners also approached him and relieved him of his money. Another man also testified that not only did Barret and Softley rob his master (a Dr. Reynolds) near Highgate Hill, but they also robbed him as well. Barret, who was a small man approximately 24 years old, and his partner Softley, who was taller, older and seemed to be the one in charge, confessed that they had both committed numerous highway robberies, sometimes together and sometimes individually. Softley, who said he had at one point been a coachman but had lost his job, said they had even once committed
multiple robberies on single night. The authors of this *Times* article emphasized the fact that these two highwaymen did not just commit one robbery, and in fact they made sure they reported on Softley’s confession that accounted for numerous offenses. The identity of the robbers, as highlighted in these articles, distinguished them from hard-working Londoners. They were not one time criminals who had held a job and erred once because times were bad. Rather they were seen as career criminals. This identity separated them from the employed citizens of the capital and robbers. This perceived demarcation zone fed the public’s opinion that “idleness” was a gateway to crime.

**Idle Hands are a Devil’s Playground**

Many writers that published theories on the sources of crime at the time believed “idleness” constituted one of the most significant factors that could lead Londoners to a life of crime. Their writings, combined with similar viewpoints in newspaper articles, expressed the fourth common belief about highwaymen and footpads – a sinful life of crime and vice. “Idleness” meant more to those who used it to describe robbers than unemployment. The perception of robbers was that they chose to not engage in honest work. Instead, the image persisted of highwaymen and footpads who committed robberies in order to fund their habits of gambling, drinking and prostitution. Idleness had several meanings to Londoners at the end of the eighteenth century, some saw it as a choice while other described it as a social problem.

In an article written in *The Times* on Wednesday the fourteenth of October 1789, the anonymous author stated that those “Idle dissolute fellows” who wandered the streets

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62 “Bow Street Office,” *The Times*, October 07, 1788.
and highways of greater London collected together “to gamble and commit robberies whenever opportunity offers. The author continued, stating that they were “a terror to all whom business or recreation leads in their way.” The reporter furthered the perception that criminals were a group of people separate from hard-working Londoners. When combined with the violence of robbery; the robbers stood as a “terror” to honest “business and recreation.” Other writers shared this opinion: robbers chose their criminal career rather than work, and “idleness” lay behind that choice.

The public perception painted a picture of highwaymen and footpads who quickly blew through all their money as they explored sins and consumed vices, and then needed to commit more robberies to resume this lifestyle. Richard King in the previously mentioned book, The New Cheats of London Exposed, contained descriptions of many different types of criminals. King labelled highwaymen as “desparate and resolute persons, who, having spent their patrimony, or lavished their substance among whores and gamesters, take to the road, in order to retrieve their broken fortunes, and either recruit them by meeting with a good booty, or else finish

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63 “Of the Police of our Public Streets,” The Times, October 14, 1789.
their lives at Tyburn [the primary location where the execution of capitaly, convicted London criminals was carried out].”

Both King and the anonymous author of the article in *The Times* placed idleness and vice on the path to becoming a robber, and once along that path, it seemed a permanent character trait.

Rather than work to support their needs, these criminals took the rewards of work from others. In a book, entitled *The Means of Effectually Preventing Theft and Robbery*, the author (who remained anonymous) argued, “To effectively suppress theft and roguery, as well as beggary, we must devise some certain method to take away that which is the common cause of both… and I presume that every one will agree with me that idleness, or the want of useful employ is the true, as well as common cause of theft and beggary.”

The author of the book (who said it was directed to the public before the argument was later presented to parliament) described idleness as unemployment, and believed that the unemployed and poor committed robbery, and if the upper class could solve the problems of poverty and unemployment then these issues would disappear.

Hewling Luson took this sentiment even further in the third version of his book *Inferior Politics* which was published in 1788. Luson argued that the rapid and alarming increase of robberies, in and around London could be attributed to the “idleness and immorality of the lower class” and the way to really make a dent in the number of robberies would be to “encourage honesty and sobriety, and to restrain (if they cannot entirely eradicate) the opposite vices.”

Luson seemed to view idleness as more than just an entry to crime.

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64 King, *New Cheats of London*, 36.
65 *The means of Effectually Preventing Theft and Robbery; together with our present cruel punishment of those and other crimes: The Means of Immediately Suppressing Vagrant Beggary: of Speedily Abolishing our Poor’s rates: and of Relieving the Present Oppression of our Labouring Commonality* (London, 1783), preface.
Instead he believed that a chain of causation began with lower-class immorality, which led to their idleness, the embracing of vices instead of virtues, and in turn led them to a life of crime. Here idleness was not viewed as a choice, rather as a social problem.

Patrick Colquhoun, in *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*, believed the causes of robbery stemmed from a more complicated situation than a simply chain of causality leading all the back to the lower class. He argued that the highwaymen, footpad robbers, burglars, pick-pockets and common thieves “who infest this great metropolis” fit into one of three classes. First, they were young men who received some education, but then developed idle habits and became seduced by gambling, debauchery, and wasteful spending and needed a way to fund these urges. The second group consisted of tradesmen who had lost their fortunes and businesses by “gaming or other pursuits” and in a desperate act turned to robbery. Colquhoun’s final group contained servants, hostlers, stable and postboys who likewise fell into “idle habits” and took up minor thieving but were then caught and imprisoned, where they learned from others ways to make greater sums of money outside the law. He even went so far as to exclaim that “Idleness is a never-failing inroad to criminality.” While Colquhoun removed the qualifier of lower class from what saw as the road that inevitably led to a life of crime, he preserved the perception that time and money spent on vices as well as a lack of the virtues that kept the hard-working Londoners from sinking to idle ways led to criminality.

Colquhoun also claimed that in “tracing the causes of the increase of public depredation by means of robberies, pilferings, and frauds, much must be attributed to ill-regulated public houses.” He argued that an investigation into the ale-house keepers at that time would reveal that a “considerable proportion” of them had “no respectability;  

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[and are] disposed to promote drunkenness, low games, and every species of vice and immorality that can be the means of increasing their trade; while not a few of them are connected with Highwayman, common Thieves, and Coiners of base Money." He believed that these public houses not only played host to the growing numbers of highwaymen and footpads, but that some of the these public houses, as well as their keepers, played a more active role and entwined themselves in the robbers’ networks.

The press also reported their suspicion of public houses, their connection to robberies, and the role they played in the criminal networks. An article in The Times that reported on the execution of two robbers, named Ward and Collins, in August of 1793, showed this reinforcement of the Colquhoun’s attitude towards alehouses. The authors of the article explained that the two robbers received their “education” from among the numerous public houses around St. George’s Fields. The author continued to say that this area (which was being developed in the eighteenth century) contained an inlet from every quarter of the city, and this made St. George’s “a convenient nursery for footpads and highwaymen.” In summary, Londoners at the time believed that idleness opened the door to vice, which in turn led to crime. Idleness, violence, and organization into gangs were all masculine traits the public ascribed to robbers.

**Absence of Evidence**

Finally, another aspect of the stereotype of highwaymen and footpads emerged from a topic left out of the public discussion on robbery. Almost all of the instances of

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68 Ibid, 41-42.
69 The Times, Thursday, August 29, 1793, 3.
robbery discussed in newspapers and published writings portrayed robbery as a male on male crime. One of the only exceptions appeared in a newspaper published on Saturday October 29th 1791. The authors told the story of two separate women tried for highway robbery, Elizabeth Powell and Elizabeth Cluff. According to the writer, Powell stopped a man and asked him for a glass of gin. As she felt in his pocket and pulled out his watch chain, two other women came up. The two accomplices grabbed the man, named Cornelious Courtly, and Powell gave him a violent blow on the face then stole his watch. The reporter then moved to the case of Cluff, who according to the article, ran up to Wolfe Levi as he travelled along the road around midnight, and snatched his hat off his head. Levi chased Cluff into a house and upstairs where she “collared him,” threw him down on the bed and stole from him two shillings and six pence. These two cases seemed an exception, and extraordinary instances of robbery that were written about because, just like other cases written about in the newspapers, they provided an interesting story to attract readers. Likewise, there also existed an almost complete absence of female victims in the public perception that emerged from the press and published works focused on robbery. In the case of the two Elizabeths, they garnered interest because of their gender. The press coverage on their crimes, combined with almost a complete absence of any other discussion of female robbers or victims, seemed to make Cluff and Powell the exception that proved the rule in the public’s image: highwaymen and footpads were men who robbed other men.

Conclusion
This chapter explored the perceptions of the crime of robbery as well who the stereotypical highwayman and footpad were in late eighteenth century London. These perceptions developed from the legal definition of the crime and played out across newspapers articles as well as books and pamphlets written at the time.

The public image of robbery at the time depicted a crime committed in enormous numbers, and one that posed a serious threat to the people in the capital – both their safety and property. Some people argued that current preventative measures remained ineffective at stopping the robbers from committing crimes in the first place; however, newspapers portrayed a scene where it appeared every highwayman and footpad was bound to the same inescapable fate: to be caught, tried, and found guilty.

The violence and gang components of the identity ascribed to robbers connected to the punishments levied against convicted highwaymen and robbers. However, the identity in the public perception related to idleness led not only to a desire to punish criminals, but also prevent crimes. This discrepancy led to a tension between fear and sympathy as public emotions towards criminals, but fear emerged as the key component of their perceptions of robbery. Fear overpowered the sympathy for Londoners at the end of the eighteenth century, and this led to a stronger desire to punish criminals than to prevent crime or reform criminals.

The public imagery of highwaymen and footpads also centered on violent male criminals who operated in organized gangs. They believed the robbers attacked with meticulously planning, that each member assumed an individual role, and assaulted the victim with no remorse – not even when it led to murder – so long as the prize was secured and the crew got away. They also thought robbers came to their chosen
profession because of idleness and unemployment, and usually they lost all their money through gambling or other debaucheries. The public discussion of robbery also described public houses and imprisonment for petty crimes as the schools where highwaymen and footpads learned the tricks of their trade. The next two chapters explore the networks and experiences of highwaymen, footpads as well as their accomplices and victims as found in transcripts of court cases and see how well these perceptions matched up with official reports of crimes and criminals.
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Footpads and Highwaymen

Fig. 11
Francisco de Goya’s “Asalto al coche” (1786-1787) depicts a coach being assaulted, its passengers being robbed and murdered by a gang of four men – one stabbing a man, two rifling through their goods while the women pleaded and one member keeping watch armed with a rifle. Image courtesy of the Wikimedia Commons [public domain].
Hyde Park corner stood as the nexus of a few highly trafficked roads in London and served as home to a gardener named Richard Collins. On the twelfth of September, around eight on a moonlit night, Collins travelled along one of the king’s roads near his house. Collins was passed by two men who turned around, brandished a pistol, and seized him. With the pistol pressed to Collins’s chest, one of the robbers demanded money, while the other man yanked Collins’s watch out of his pocket. Collins, in an attempt to hold on to even a little of his money, tried to quickly and discretely slip half a guinea into one of his inner pockets. This move did not go unnoticed by the robbers. They snatched the money out of his hand then rifled through all of Collins’ pockets and took all the valuables he had.

Collins retold this story in his courtroom testimony against Thomas Humphreys, one of the robbers. The whole affair, he said, lasted “about a minute and a half;” Humphreys and his associate were quick and efficient. Collins stated that after the attack, he pursued the men across a field shouting “stop thief!” Thomas Grady, a passerby, joined Collins and helped chase the two men through fields, over hedges, and down the road until the robbers bumped into some watchmen. The entire group then chased the robbers and cornered them in a timber yard. Constables seized Humphreys, a jury found him guilty, and sentenced him to death. In the trial record no mention was made of Humphrey’s partner.\(^70\)

\(^{70}\) *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 10 January 2013), September 1780, trial of THOMAS HUMPHREYS (t17800913-102).
multiple patterns and questions that surface from the case transcripts such as age and
gender of those accused of robbery, whether or not the robbers more frequently
committed the crimes individually or as part of a gang, the manner with which the
robbers carried out these attacks, what the effects of wartime and peace had on the rates
of robberies committed, and what networks robbers and robberies utilized.

This chapter is broken up into five sections. The first four parts create a profile of
London robbers at the end of the eighteenth century. The first two segments focus on the
highwaymen and footpads themselves, the characteristics they exhibited, as well as the
networks they were a part of. The second part of this chapter centers around the robbery
itself, what happened when robberies occurred, as well as when and where the crimes
took place. In the fourth unit of the chapter, I discuss what happened to the robbers after
the crime: the processes of their apprehensions, what they experienced in court, and what
punishments they could expect following a conviction. Finally, the chapter ends with a
look at some of the potential causes of robbery that emerged from the court transcripts.

Whereas popular perceptions represented robbers as bloodthirsty killers, this
profile of the robber suggest that with permeable barriers to entry, robbery opened itself
up to a variety of people. Despite this ease of entry, highwaymen and footpads tended to
be young adult men who used violence to steal from whoever came upon their path.
Violence did not occur any more commonly, or to any greater degree, with footpads than
it did with highwaymen, and therefore the romantic vision of the noble highwayman on
horseback did not typify those tried for highway robbery in London at the end of the
eighteenth century. A little more than half of robberies examined from these years
involved gangs. Robbers rarely had permanent jobs at the time they committed their
crimes, or no mention of their jobs occurred in the trials. Robberies and highway robberies occurred more frequently in certain neighborhoods of the city, and likewise, more frequently in times of peace than war. Prostitution, alehouses, and pawnbrokers established networks that connected footpads and highwaymen to other criminal activities as well as to everyday social life in London.

Proceedings of trials at the Old Bailey Courthouse captured the stories of the robbers. Published from 1674 until 1913, the *Proceedings* contained direct transcripts of the trials that took place at the Old Bailey. The printers of the *Proceedings* circulated a new volume after each session (when the court met) which happened eight times a year until 1834 and ten to twelve times a year after that. These inexpensive, regularly published reports were at first targeted at a popular audience and a source of great income for their publishers. Historians Clive Emsley, Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker argue that by the late eighteenth century, “public interest in the lives of ordinary criminals was waning, and other types of literature about crime, such as criminal biographies, lost popularity.” However, newspapers replaced the proceedings as public fare and covered criminal activity – including the happenings at the Old Bailey. Rather than any loss of interest in criminal activity, it seemed more likely that the “popular audience” shifted its preferred method of getting stories of crime from the *Proceedings* and criminal biographies to reading about them in newspapers. During the eighteenth century, the *Proceedings* became no longer “commercially viable” for their publishers and in 1787 the city issued a subsidy in order to continue publication. After the subsidy started, 320 free copies went out to City officials, and the city recorder began to use the

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Proceedings as official records of criminal and legal activity in the capital.\textsuperscript{73} Newspapers became the avenue for the public to read and discuss stories about criminal activity, while the Proceedings shifted their target audience away from the public.

The Proceedings became more concerned with being official records; this shift made the transcripts more detailed and a window into lives and crimes of the accused. In 1778 the city government demanded that the Proceedings provide “true, fair, and perfect narrative” of the trials. The reports of all cases were treated with greater detail. Other practices used primarily to entertain and peddle copies also ceased – such as covering more “entertaining” crimes in great detail, giving minimal coverage to more mundane crimes and splitting exciting trials among multiple issues to increase suspense.

The Robbers

Robbery did not require the specific skill sets or training that some of the other specialties of thievery did, such as lock-picking, or pick-pocketing. Anyone could use force (with or without weapons) to take possessions from another Londoner. While this openness may make it seem that almost any Londoner could have committed highway robbery or robbery, robbers whose cases appeared at the Old Bailey shared a few traits. Robberies were often committed by violent gangs of young men, but women and individuals also robbed Londoners at the end of the eighteenth century.

The age of those accused of robbery and highway robbery was primarily between twenty and twenty-nine years old – this age group accounted for 106 of defendants whose age was known while all the other cohorts amounted to only 102. This age distribution

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
reflected the population of London more generally. As Emsley, Hitchcock and Shoemaker state, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Londoners tended to be both younger than people living elsewhere in the British Isles.\footnote{Clive Emsley, Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, "A Population History of London", \textit{Old Bailey Proceedings Online} (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 14 January 2013).} Charles Silk, at age twenty-one, represented the age of many robbers in London at the time. Around eight o’clock on the fifteenth of August, Silk robbed Jane Jackson in Newington-green on one of the King’s highways. Armed with a stick with a hook, Silk threatened to knock the woman’s eyes out unless she gave him her purse. Silk used his youth and athleticism after the crime to flee the scene, but it was not enough and some nearby Londoners apprehended him. Silk appeared before the court at Old Baily and was convicted of highway robbery.\footnote{\textit{Old Bailey Proceedings Online} (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 14 May 2013), September 1800, trial of CHARLES SILK (t18000917-37).}

Of the robbers tried at the Old Bailey whose age was recorded, fifty were between the age of nine and nineteen. The case of the robbery of Henry Meason involved four young men, including Meason, all under twenty years old. As he traveled along Cherry Tree Alley at around one in the afternoon, the thirteen year old Meason came upon William Damant (age eleven), Robert Read (age nineteen), and John Mitton (age eighteen). Meason testified that the young boy, Damant, grabbed hold of him and the other two attackers forcefully took a bag he carried for his master, a watchmaker. Damant pleaded in his defense testimony that he did not commit the crime and all he did was pass through the area, that he knew nothing of the crime. Despite this, four witnesses backed up the young victim’s accounts, and the jury found Damant, Read, and Mitton all guilty, and sentenced them to death. After the jury delivered the verdict, they
did however request that the court take mercy on Damant. To this the judge, Mr. Justice Buller, replied, “As far as the boy’s life goes I mean to interpose, but it will be no interest to him or the publick that he should remain in this country.” There is no mention of what final sentence eleven-year-old William Damant faced, but the judge’s words implied a reduced sentence of transportation, as opposed to the death sentences eighteen-year-old Mitton and nineteen-year-old Read received.

Damant demonstrated that even Londoners as young as eleven engaged in robbery, and had their own role, even if only in subordinate roles such as just detaining the victim. A conflict emerged between the messages presented by the jury and the judge in this court case. The jury and judge believed it necessary to intervene in case of Damant, but they still feared further robberies at his hands enough to exile him from the country. With only two robbers tried at the time younger than Damant, his age made him an outlier as a robber, and gave pause to the jury and judge when it came time to sentence an eleven year old to death. However, with at least twenty-nine robbers on trial between the ages of eighteen and nineteen, Read and Mitton appeared less of a unique case, and neither the jury nor the judge hesitated when it came time to sentence those two robbers.

There were only fifty-one total cases tried at the Old Bailey where the accused was known to be anywhere above the age of twenty-nine. Similar to the case of William Damant, at fifty-years-old, John East presented another exceptional case to the court because of his age. Convicted of highway robbery, East robbed Richard Brooke at gunpoint of a half-guinea, a half-crown, and two shillings in a silk purse worth four pence. Despite his age, East still ran away from the crime and led the victim and another

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76 Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 09 April 2013), January 1790, trial of WILLIAM DAMANT ROBERT READ JOHN MITTON (t17900113-3).
young man on a bit of a chase. When Richard Brooke and another Londoner finally caught up to East and overtook him, East surrendered his pistol, and stated that he never meant any harm, as it actually contained no shot or powder. Though older individuals sometimes robbed, robbery was a trade of the young.

In addition to generally being young adults, many of those who were on trial for robbery or highway robbery either did not have a job aside from their criminal enterprise, or discussion of their employment never came up in their trial. Out of the 125 cases that were analyzed in the course of this study, only forty-three mentioned the accused robbers’ occupations (either by a defense witness or the defendant themselves). Porters, sawyers and prostitutes all showed up more than once as defendants in trials of robbery and highway robbery at the Old Bailey. Fishermen and servants seemed like more common occupations for potential robbers, with each showing up in six different trials. Thirteen individuals on trial for robbery or highway robbery stated in their defense that they served in the military, which made it the most common line of work that appeared in the trials. Often these individuals called in their superiors or members of their regiments as character witnesses.

Thomas Humphreys, served in the military, as did William Brown. Brown worked on multiple British ships as a soldier until he came back home to London. When brought before the court for a robbery he committed in the dwelling-house of a cheesemonger named Carter Daking, the court asked about Brown’s current situation. “Had he no visible way of getting his lively-hood from the time he came home till then?” “No” replied a witness, “he lived with his brother in Wheeler-street.” Brown had been

77 Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 14 April 2013), December 1800, trial of JOHN EAST (t18001203-22).
in the warehouse connected to Daking’s house when he threatened at knife-point to destroy Daking’s house if he didn’t give him money. Daking gave Brown one single shilling. The jury convicted Brown, and the judge sentenced him to death.

Brown acted alone, but as in the trial of William Damant, gangs played an important part in robberies and highway robberies in London. Roughly seventy percent of the trial records analyzed for this thesis involved gangs of some kind. In her discussion of footpads, historian Lucy Moore found that “thieves on foot… worked in groups of 2 or 3, but sometimes a gang was a big as 20.” She describes these gangs as “loosely organized” because “members would drift in and out of gaol, go back to their families in other parts of the country, be hanged or transported, sometimes return from the colonies; new members would join… this meant that despite oaths of friendship and allegiance sworn by their members, incentives of pardon or reward tempted them to inform on their companions.”

In this thesis the term “gangs” refers to a group of two or more people carrying out a robbery or highway robbery. Most gangs found in the Old Bailey cases had a small membership, usually two or three persons, and both highwaymen and footpads worked in gangs. Rarely did evidence appear in the trials to suggest that members of gangs turned on each other for a pardon or a reward. This finding, of course, does not preclude the possibility that captured robbers may have struck deals outside the courts. Most of those prisoners on trial pleaded innocent and did not admit their own involvement, much less turn on their partners.

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78 For a discussion of currency, wages, and the value in today’s money, see chapter 1, footnote 55.
79 Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 05 February 2013), June 1780, trial of WILLIAM BROWN (t17800628-35).
80 Moore, Thieves Opera, 74-76.
A typical gang robbery occurred around midnight on the fifth of June 1780, as Thomas Large travelled along the road that night in a coach with four other people. Two men, armed with pistols, rode up on either side of the coach and forced it to. They positioned themselves on either side of the travelers and took their money, threatening to “blow their brains out” if they refused. None of the victims were able to identify the highwaymen; because, as Large put it, “it was so dark that I could not perceive the person.” Only one man, Francis Lawley, came to trial for this highway robbery, but the jury found him not guilty. The two men who robbed Large demonstrated the common traits of gangs involved in robbery at the time, they operated in a small group in which each member had a role – in this case each took a side of the coach – and this allowed for an organized and efficient method of crime and the small group made it easier to get away afterwards.

Gangs sometimes recruited young members to carry out their crimes. Sixteen-year-old John Herman appeared before the court for the highway robbery of Sarah Watson, on October 4th 1800. As Watson was carrying a bundle of linen to a client’s house on the corner of Chapel Street and Lamb’s Conduit Street, she ran into John Herman and four other men. Herman snatched her bundle and ran away. The bundle of freshly washed clothes included four handkerchiefs, four shirts, three petticoats, a flannel petticoat, four frocks, and seven pin-cloths, all valued nine shillings and twelve pence. William Fasson, a brewer’s servant, who heard Watson’s cries for help, stopped Herman. Herman said a man employed him to take the bundle to “The Foundling” (the Foundling Hospital, Britain’s first home for abandoned children) and he would meet them there.

81 Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 05 February 2013), June 1780, trial of FRANCIS LAWLEY (t17800628-46).
Since he snatched the package but did not directly use violence or the threat of violence, the court found him “guilty of stealing, but not violently” and sentenced him to transportation for no less than seven years.\(^\text{82}\)

Robbers in London seemed predominantly, though not exclusively, male. Between 1780 and 1800, 924 cases of robbery took place at the Old Bailey with male defendants, 132 cases with female robbers, and twenty-six cases in which two or more defendants of different genders stood trial. Two of these men convicted of robbery at the Old Bailey, Thomas Kelly and Andrew Gray, attacked Jacob Rotherker on one of the King’s highways on the thirtieth of June 1780. As Rotherker made the fifteen mile return trip to his home on Marshall Street in Camaby Market in London from nearby Hays, Kelly and Gray approached him. The two robbers, both of them soldiers at the time, pressed a bayonet to Rotherker’s chest and insisted he surrender his money. Rotherker pleaded with his assailants that, as a poor man, he had only the half a guinea (roughly ten shillings) in gold he earned that day as a harpsichord player. Kelly and Gray slashed him multiple times with their bayonets during the attack and threatened to “run him through.” The two footpads came away from the ordeal with the ten shillings and a linen handkerchief worth one shilling. They tossed Rotherker a shilling and told him not to move or make a noise or else they would kill him. Grey and Kelly denied the accusation, or as Grey (and many other accused of crimes at the time) put it, “I am as innocent of it as a child unborn.” Both had witnesses for their defense, but the jury was unconvinced and they were sentenced to death.\(^\text{83}\)

\(^{82}\) *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 22 January 2013), October 1800, trial of JOHN HERMAN (t18001029-34).

\(^{83}\) *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 18 January 2013), June 1780, trial of THOMAS KELLY ANDREW GRAY (t17800628-32).
The arresting officer stated in court that when confronted on the street, Kelly and Grey fired back, saying “Would you take such a blackguard’s word, we shall be punished for what he said.” Kelly and Grey typified many robbers at the time, not only because of their gender, but in that they did not seem remorseful, nor did they target someone much better off financially than themselves. Their attack did not constitute some form of violent class conflict, in order take from their victim what made him better than they. They used violence to steal from an easy mark, a man traveling on foot, by himself, even if they only came away with a score of eleven shillings.

Although men made up eighty-five percent of the recorded cases of robbery and highway robbery over the twenty year period, in at least 150 of the trials for robbery that took place at the Old Bailey between 1780 and 1800, women participated in the crime. William Coppen discovered that women could be robbers when he met Margaret M’Locklin and Mary Allen in Whitechapel on September nineteenth, 1780.

Coppen, a journeyman baker, bumped into M’Locklin, who grabbed him and threw him into a house near Three-Ton Alley. She locked the door and the two of them struggled over his watch before Mary Allen joined in to help. M’Locklin stuffed the watch into her dress, pulled out a knife she concealed in her clothes, threatened to shove it in Coppen’s eye, and sliced the side of his face to make sure he knew she meant business. Two men passing by heard his cries for help, and broke open the door to find M’Locklin dropping a knife as well as a bloody man lying on the floor. M’Locklin said

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84 More commonly pronounced “blaggard,” the word’s origin derived from the early sixteenth century as two words “black” and “guard.” The term blackguard originally referred to a body of attendants or servants, specifically the ones who had charge of kitchen utensils, but “the exact significance of the epithet ‘black’ is uncertain.” Over time the term acquired a more offensive meaning, referring to “a man who behaves in a dishonorable or contemptible way.” "Blackguard," Oxford Dictionaries, April 2010, Oxford University Press, Accessed January 18, 2013, http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/blackguard.
that Coppen had “laid down upon the bed upon me half an hour” and promised the watch as collateral until he gathered the money to pay for her services. M’Locklin argued that when they finished he tried to take the watch that he promised her, and even though Mary Allen backed her story up, they did not convince the jury who found them guilty and the judge sentenced them to death.85

However, this case seemed to be an exceptional one and if women engaged in theft at the time, it seemed more likely that they used their wit and cunning to steal from people rather than blunt force or the threat of violence. British crime historian J.M. Beattie states in his analysis of crime in the counties of Surrey and Sussex that between 1663 and 1802 it was a “common observation” that the modern world of crime was the province of men. Beattie argues that “apart from poaching and forgery, women participated in the same range of crimes as men” and that property offences, including robbery and highway robbery, accounted for a third of each gender’s crimes. He does state that a lower level of female criminality is “clearly apparent,” – men outnumbered women by more than three to one in most crimes. He also maintains that women “not only commit fewer crimes than men, but commit them less violently and less aggressively.”86 Beattie’s findings are borne out by my own study on late eighteenth century London.

Women appearing at the Old Bailey were less likely to commit robbery or highway robbery than thefts such as pickpocketing or shoplifting. As opposed to the twelve percent of highway robbery and robbery cases (132 total) that involved female

85 Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 19 January 2013), October 1780, trial of MARGARET M’LOCKLIN MARY ALLEN (t17801018-29).
criminals, women committed twenty-six percent (or 3,269 total) of the “less violent” thefts at the time (pick-pocketing, housebreaking, larceny and many other types or those classified in the Old Bailey Online court records “non-violent” thefts). The proportion of male robbers to female robbers far outweighed the ratio of men to women in London. In 1801, women made up fifty-four percent of London’s total population, however, they only accounted for fifteen percent of the robbers at the end of the eighteenth century. It is safe to conclude that, robbery at the time, was a male criminal activity.

The official court records referred to M’Locklin and Allen as “spinsters” a term that that once referred to women who spun wool. However, from the seventeenth century on, it became a term, especially a legal term, for an unmarried woman (either a victim or criminal) and usually one past the age that other women typically married. The women who spun wool had their own source of income, which may have granted them some independence, at least in a fiscal sense. The evolution of the word from women who had an independent source of income to a legal term used to denote unmarried women, also suggests the legal view of these women as independent, in the very least in an economic sense.

Ethnicity and nationality in London appeared in the trials that I read, but with almost no mention of them as robbers. Instead they showed up occasionally as the victim of robberies and highway robbers. The lack of evidence in the trials I read suggests that

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87 While the two categories seem very clear cut – violent vs non-violent – the truth is a little more complicated. The “violent theft” category only includes robbery and highway robbery – where violence is part of the legal definition, while “theft” includes all other types of thievery, a very wide reaching category. Even so there were a few instances where those people accused of robbery ended up being convicted of “stealing, but not violently” and having their sentences reduced.


at the time highwaymen and footpads seemed to consist almost exclusively of
Englishmen and women, however, more research needs to be done into crime in the immigrant communities of London. From the Old Bailey records, the average robber was a young man, probably a Londoner by birth, and probably working class. The robbers sometimes acted alone, but often they joined with others to accost travelers and inflict violence while robbing them. Highwaymen and footpads’ associations extended beyond other robbers and into aspects of social life in London.

**Networks**

Robbers created connections with establishments and networks throughout London in order to find potential victims, recruit new gang members, sell their stolen fortunes, and increase their chances of successfully robbing someone and escaping. The networks they interacted with included many of the same networks that Londoners not involved in criminal activity engaged with on a daily basis; including: prostitution, pawnbrokers, public houses and workhouses.

Often crime appeared in conjunction with prostitution in the Old Bailey trials for robbery, highway robbery, and especially theft in general. Prostitution seemed to establish a link between those engaged in robbery and potential victims. One of the professions open to women at the end of the eighteenth century in London was prostitution. Because Beattie compares urban and rural crime patterns he stands in a good position to provide insight into the differences between the two. He states that women more often engaged in criminal activity in the city, however they seemed less
likely to commit violent crimes such as robbery than “less violent” crimes such as larceny. He argues this behavior stemmed more from “social realities” and the place of women in society, than from any biological and emotional factors. Beattie argues that in urban environments “women were thrown more directly into contact with a wider society; they were more regularly part of the work force and more dependent on working for wages and thus were more vulnerable to economic fluctuations; and they were less protected, sheltered, and restricted.” More single women in cities lived in lodgings with independent source of income than in rural areas. However, he does state that fluctuations in women’s crime in London did not seem as severe as in other urban areas due to the degree to which women in financial need could turn to prostitution for support.  

The court records for London in the late eighteenth century suggest that prostitution created links of communication between everyday life and criminal activity, including robbery. For women living on the streets, prostitution was an option to be taken when it suited them, or the opportunity arose. If they wanted to, prostitutes would approach well-dressed men on the street and could potentially earn from three pence all the way up to 250 pounds; brothels provided expensive alternatives to streetwalkers.  

Throughout the court cases, prostitution appeared often in the course of criminal activity, either discussed by the victim to establish a timeline before a robbery or theft occurred, or sometimes – as in the case of Margaret M’Locklin and Mary Allen – it was used as an alibi. No matter who discussed prostitution in court, the discussion appeared in records

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openly as a business transaction and without any repercussions.\textsuperscript{92} The historian Dan Cruickshank, when exploring the relationship between the sex industry and crime in London. He contends that the sex industry was a sophisticated and well-organized business that crossed class boundaries and touched many aspects of everyday life. This enterprise even led to the creation of “purpose designed” buildings such as \textit{hummums} and \textit{bagnios} – public “Turkish” bathhouses and brothels.\textsuperscript{93} Like Cruickshank I analyze the links that prostitution created between robbers and their potential victims. For women prostitution paid them for sex work and opened the portal for crime.

While prostitution was commonplace in the records only one of the court transcripts studied for this project attached a negative connotation to the profession. Isabella Rowles stood trial for highway robbery against Margaret Knowland on May eighth, 1790. Knowland claimed that while fetching some liquor for a sick friend from a public house on High Street in Whitechapel, Rowles assaulted her and took a buckle, a hat, and a ribbon from her, a combined value of three shillings and four pennies. After Margaret Knowland recounted her story of the events of that night, Rowles struck back, “I wish you would seek into the prosecutrix’s [Knowland] character; she is a misfortunate woman like myself.” To this the court replied “you are at liberty to call any witness to your character; but you seem to have no character of your own.”\textsuperscript{94} Neither Rowles nor the court official stated anything directly about prostitution, but both seemed to make the

\textsuperscript{94} \textit{Old Bailey Proceedings Online} (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 28 January 2013), May 1790, trial of ISABELLA ROWLES (t17900526-27).
only comments that brought the integrity of prostitutes as witnesses (for the defense or prosecution) into question.

Fig. 12
The picture below on the left depicts “A Woman of all Trades, from Covent Garden” – which was a euphemism for a prostitute – and was done by Turner Snow Hill on October 28, 1782. The picture on the right was done by W Dent in the 1790s and has a caption that reads: “A LOBBY FLESCH-MONGER treating with A SALES WOMAN for A PRIME PIECE, or buying Fruit at COVENT GARDEN MARKET for an Evening’s ENTERTAINMENT.” The picture on the right also contains euphemisms in the drawing itself such as ‘private contract.’ Images courtesy of the Wikimedia Commons [public domain].

The thinly veiled references to prostitution that appeared in the trial records also surfaced elsewhere in London society, such as the above illustrations. One of London’s primary fruit and vegetable markets, Covent Garden seemed to have become known as a notorious haven for prostitutes and one of the wards with the highest concentration of robbery toward the end of the eighteenth century. Both pictures of prostitution portrayed thinly veiled euphemisms, however the artists did not come right out and

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mention specifically prostitution or prostitutes – as if the creator and viewer both knew what really went on in Convent Garden but did not want to acknowledge it directly. In the picture on the right however, the cartoonist created a more brazen illustration of Covent Garden. The “basket of fruit” the woman carried and tried to sell to the finely dressed gentleman, had a label which read a “list of Covent Garden Ladies 1790.” These thinly veiled references to prostitution echoed those seen in the trials at the Old Bailey.

Similar to the sex industry, pawnbrokers, coffee houses, and alehouses also made connections in the webs of spaces and occupations that tied together highwaymen and footpads of the criminal underground and their potential victims. These establishments became areas of frequent congregation and interaction and a part of everyday life. Moore states that part of the significance of these institutions stemmed from the fact that because most Londoners, except the very wealthy, rented their accommodations, almost everyone ate their meals at a coffee house or tavern. Beattie argues that the city of London provided a network of ‘safe’ public houses and lodging houses, receivers, and liverymen, and stable-keepers who hired out horses without asking too many questions. In addition to the business Beattie discusses, footpads and highwaymen usually resold their pilfered goods through pawnshops for less than their actual value, and usually without questions at the time. One common example of this business interaction occurred when a soldier named John Sparrow robbed a man named John Turner Harris of his watch. When a member of the Bow Street Runners took Sparrow into custody and searched him, he

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96 Beattie, Crime and Courts, 159.; Moore, Thieves Opera, 75, 123.
found a pawnbroker’s duplicate (the ticket or receipt) for the watch, and the watch was later found at the pawnbroker’s, whose servant testified that Sparrow had sold it there.\textsuperscript{97}

When taverns and public houses showed up in the robbery and highway robbery trials, the person testifying described them either as the staging grounds where the robbers planned and selected their target, or as meeting places to regroup after the crime. When watchmen or Bow Street “runners” looked for robbers who had not yet been apprehended they tended to check public houses. Many times these social gathering places also served as areas for watchmen, runners, or constables to privately search suspected highwaymen and footpads for evidence of their guilt.

The trial of Elizabeth Deering, also known as Elizabeth Murray, exemplifies the use of the public house as a staging point for robbery. Deering, and her two accomplices who later escaped capture or at least did not show up in court, sat in “one part of the box” at the public house in Long-alley in the Moorfields around half past ten on Sunday night the sixteenth of November when David English came in and sat down at another part of the box. Later in court, English said he drank three pints of beer while he waited to meet someone at the public house. When he left, Deering and the two men followed him. Deering shoved English up against a wall, and once her two associates had him pinned so that he could not move, she put her arm around his neck and with her other hand took his silver watch. English claimed he was sober at the time, but in her defense Deering tried to argue that he seemed “very much intoxicated,” and that she simply found the watch in the passageway. Nonetheless, the jury did not believe her and found her guilty.\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{97} \textit{Old Bailey Proceedings Online} (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 05 February 2013), April 1780, trial of JOHN SPARROW (t17800405-3).

\textsuperscript{98} \textit{Old Bailey Proceedings Online} (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 05 February 2013), December 1800, trial of ELIZABETH DEERING, alias MURRAY (t18001203-21).
Footpads and highwaymen occasionally committed their crimes in public houses or with direct help from the people who worked there. On December thirteenth, 1790, a group of footpads jumped John Tate, beat him, and took his silver watch along with some money. When one of them, George Higgs, finally got off of him and took off running, Tate chased him to the Windmill public house. Higgs ran into the building and when his pursuer entered, another man – who Tate described as “as bad as” Higgs – confronted him. Higgs hid under the bar of the public house. The man who confronted Tate asked why he was so dirty, and Tate replied that the man sitting under the bar had robbed him. “Why don’t you secure him,” the man replied. Tate told the court that the man made him too afraid to make any attempt to detain Higgs. At that time a city watchman passed nearby and Tate called him to assist. Higgs tried to run again but did not escape capture that time. The watchman later searched Higgs, but found none of the stolen items in his possession. A member of the Royal Navy, Higgs said he simply went in to the public house to get a drink, and he knew nothing about the crime. With the items never found, the jury found Higgs not guilty. 99

Alehouses proved to be another establishment in the network connecting business to crime. Peter Clark, in his study of English drinking establishments, states that for most of this period in English history three classes of victualing, or food supplying houses, existed in order of declining size and status: the inn, the tavern, and the alehouse. Taverns and inns began to decline in numbers in the late eighteenth century, but larger

“alehouses” – whose name gradually gave way to “public house” – and coffeehouses rose to take their place.¹⁰⁰

Alehouses, and later public houses, were an important part of daily life for Londoners, and this significance made robbers’ connections to alehouses a crucial part of the networks they operated. These establishments functioned as family businesses with the woman of the family “playing a pivotal role” in their operations. They tended to serve a predominantly lower class clientele, and attracted both neighbors and visiting travelers. Alehouses provided drinks, food, sometimes lodging, and Clark says, provided a “focal point for a matrix of economic, social and cultural activities.” Clark argues that it is impossible to think about streets and neighborhoods in early modern times without coming back to the enduring success and “over-arching” role of English drinking establishments. The success and strength of its place in English society came from the paradoxical nature of alehouse. They maintained a consistent structure in their “institutional parameters,” yet quickly adapted to new conditions and performed well financially. They remained a private dwelling house while at the same time they held the

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role of a social meeting place. It became an extension of the family and yet a rival to it.\footnote{Ibid., 337-341.}

Robbers may have set up surveillance of public houses, not only because of the benefit of finding an inebriated and potentially easy target to rob, but also because so many people went through these institutions every day. As these patrons brought their money and stayed until the sun set, robbers could have simply waited to find the target that seemed most desirable. As Peter Clark discusses the role of these drinking institutions in English society and everyday life, the research done in this study suggests that these establishments also held an important role in the lives of highwaymen and footpads and their criminal activity. Public houses and alehouses formed a crucial part of the web of networks connecting robbers to the everyday social life in London.

Workhouses created another point of interaction between lives of highwaymen and footpads and the lives of Londoners not engaged in criminal activity.\footnote{Workhouses date back as far as 1631 when the Mayor of Abingdon declared “wee haue erected within our borough a workehouse to sett poore people to worke.”; Peter Higginbotham, "Introduction", The History of the Workhouse, Accessed April, 12 2013, http://www.workhouses.org.uk/intro/.

Fig. 14 “Workhouse, St. James’s Parish” (1808) by Thomas Rowlandson (1756–1827) and Augustus Charles Pugin (1762–1832) in William Henry Pyne and William Combe’s The Microcosm of London or London in Miniature, plate 96. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons [public domain].}
elsewhere, but often these institutions functioned more like prisons than charities. The workhouses may have created enough desperation in some individuals to drive them towards robbery, a crime which was open to desperate amateur criminals. They may have also generated fertile grounds for gangs of robbers to seek out and recruit new members. By 1776, over 16,000 men, women and children lived in the eighty workhouses in London – between one and two percent of London’s total population at the time.  

Peter Higginbotham, who has conducted extensive research into all aspects of the history of workhouses, states that the workhouses separated men, women, children, the infirm, in different wards and parents could only see their children for maybe an hour each week – usually on a Sunday afternoon. Residents of poor houses ate gruel, a watery porridge, or bread and cheese. Similar to a prison, the workhouses gave the “inmates” a required uniform, forced supervised baths once a week, and assigned tasks like stone-breaking or picking apart old ropes called oakum. He also says that workhouses did not function exactly like prisons, because at least in principle people could leave the workhouse if work became available. Some people became “in and outs,” constantly entering and leaving, while others remained in workhouses throughout their lives.  

The historian Lucy Moore argues that “workhouses, like prisons, were also considered to be schools of crime, where potential miscreants met and made contact with one another.” To some Londoners crime presented an alternative to living and working in the workhouses. Some residents of workhouses may have seen crime as an escape from their current condition. Others may have become new members of a gang of robbers.

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105 Moore, Thieves Opera, 33.
robbers all from inside these workhouses. Many times robbers are referred to in trials by witnesses, officers, and victims as “desperate” men or women; in one case the victim even described one of the men who robbed him as “the most desperate man I ever knew.” The life of Thomas Vobe represented one example of a former workhouse resident who ended up before the court on trial for robbery.

Born on the twenty-third of August 1767 and the oldest of six children in a pauper family, Thomas Vobe spent time at the workhouse in the parish of St. Clement Danes in 1787. Thomas left the workhouse at around age twenty when he found employment as a waiter at the “new England Coffee House.” Thomas also worked at the Devil Tavern in Fleet Street, but his lawful employment did not last. During this time, he met a nineteen-year-old servant named Margaret Bell, and the two gave birth to an illegitimate daughter. After this, Vobe quit his job and ran away, most likely to avoid the responsibility of having to support his child. From here his life took an even darker turn, and on the seventeenth of December a constable arrested Vobe for robbing a mantua-maker returning from work to her home on Orange Street in Red Lyon Square. Thomas Vobe snatched Ann Lincoln’s bundle as she walked along Holywell Street. He took clothing and fabrics worth a total value of fifty shillings and 24 pennies. Lincoln and another woman who witnessed the theft cried out “stop thief!” and chased after Vobe. A nearby soldier heard the cries and caught him. Vobe appeared before the Old Bailey on the ninth of January 1788 for highway robbery, but Lincoln told the court that he did not use any direct violence against her. Following this testimony, the jury convicted Vobe, who

claimed innocence, of the lesser sentence of stealing, not violently, and sentenced him to transportation for seven years.  

However, individuals also got out of the workhouses without resorting to crime, including Thomas’s sister Jane Vobe. Jane spent time in the St. Clements Danes Parish workhouse from 1783 to 1785 where she spun mop yarn. She began an apprenticeship at the age of ten (apprenticeship became mandatory in workhouses at age thirteen) as a tambour worker in Buxton Place, Lambeth Surrey. Though she left the apprenticeship, she did not reappear in any more records. Therefore, she did not return to the workhouses – but she also did not end up in court for any crimes.

Highwaymen and footpads created networks with institutions and establishments that interacted with everyday life in London. They used these connections to advance their pursuit of fortunes, and these networks also integrated robbery into the business and social networks of the city before and after robbers committed their crimes. The next section focuses on what happened when highwaymen and footpads committed robberies.

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The Crimes
While no neighborhoods appeared safe from the threat of highwaymen and footpads, robberies and highway robberies seemed more likely to occur in certain areas of London than others around the end of the eighteenth century. The maps on these pages pinpoint the locations of robberies and highway robberies in London from 1780 to 1800. I created the maps using online software developed by the Locating London’s Past.
project, and mapped the data provided by the *Old Bailey Online* database, with the second map grouped by wards. Remnants of the medieval system that governed the city, the wards of London allowed small areas to exist as self-governing units inside the municipality of capital.\footnote{Margaret Irene Catcart Borer, *The City of London: A History* (New York: D. McKay Co, 1978), 11.} I used the historic base map of John Rocque’s 1746 *Survey of London, Westminster & Southwark*.\footnote{Rocque, who was born in Geneva to Huguenot Parents in 1704, came to London sometime prior to 1734 where he began his career planning aristocratic gardens. He started his survey map of London in 1737, and the nine year project was supported by subscription, where supporters paid one guinea up front and another two when the finished product was delivered. In total 246 people purchased a copy of his map including Frederick, the Prince of Wales, who would later appoint Rocque as the official royal cartographer until he passed away in 1762. The creators of the *Locating London’s Past* project had already geo-referenced matching known points with modern maps so that the geocoded data of the cases from the Old Bailey Proceedings could be mapped and made GIS compliant. “John Rocque’s Survey of London, Westminster & Southwark, 1746,” *Locating London’s Past* (www.locatinglondon.org, version 1.0, 17 December 2011); “Mapping Methodology,” *Locating London’s Past* (www.locatinglondon.org, version 1.0, 17 December 2011).} Of those cases I read that provided enough data to locate the scene of the crime, 201 took place in the areas of St. James, Holburn and Covent Garden, St. Katherine’s and Wapping, and the West End. The location of the other 246 mappable crimes that dispersed across the remainder of the city (fifty-two different subsections). A tension emerged between the places robberies occurred; a higher concentrations of these crimes existed in four specific areas compared to the rest of the city, but robberies and highway robberies occurred for the most part throughout the entire city.

While robberies may have been more likely to occur in certain areas of London, crime in London could not be “explained” by place alone. The Chicago School’s theory on the importance of setting and surrounding factors as explanations for criminal behavior, would suggest that there are some qualities of these specific areas that account for crime. Here, in this study, the relationship between prostitution and robbery in areas like Covent Garden helped to demonstrate the concentration of crime in certain wards.
However, the concentration – but not exclusivity – of robbery and highway robbery in certain areas of the city suggested that social setting and location contributed to the likelihood that these crimes would occur, but it did not prevent them from occurring elsewhere. Highwaymen and footpads may have been opportunists when it came to choosing the location to commit robberies, however they chose to commit their crimes at night for specific reasons.

Whether using the figurative shroud of night, or the literal shroud of fabric, highwaymen and footpads took steps to avoid getting caught. The cloak of night became an important asset to robbers who wanted to mask their identity, and the fear of robbers at nighttime seemed rampant. A. Roger Ekirch, who chronicles pre-industrial nocturnal life in western society in his book *At Day’s Close*, states that “darkness in the early modern world summoned the worst elements in man, nature and the cosmos. Murders and thieves, terrible calamities, and satanic spirits lurked everywhere.” He employs a phrase from Elizabethan dramatist Thomas Kyd who called night the “coverer of accursed crimes.” Likewise, the thieves *cant* (or slang terms) “a good darky,” which meant a fit night for stealing, and the designation of the moon as the “tattler” demonstrated the attitudes of the criminally industrious toward the night and darkness.  

While many of the robberies tried in the Old Bailey took place at night, the discussion of night in the trials varied from a simple mention of the time the robbery occurred to a discussion about the type of night when the incident occurred. Many times the discussion of night came during the opening testimony by the victim, as the court used the night to gage the accuracy of the prosecutor’s knowledge of the person who

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robbed them. Primarily, this meant that the prosecutor explained the degree to which the cloak of night veiled their assailants.

A typical example of the dialogue surrounding light and darkness at night occurred in the trial of William Thompson also known as William Bennet, who stole a watch with a gold case valued at ten pounds as well as a guinea and a half in money from William Johnson. As Johnson gave his opening testimony, and retold the events that took place around seven in the evening of the sixteenth of September 1780, the court specifically asked him: “was it light?” To this, he replied “It was; the prisoner is to the best of my knowledge the man who came on the left side of the carriage.” The prisoner, William Thompson, said he had no knowledge of “the affair,” but the jury found him guilty; without the darkness, there was little doubt in their minds that Johnson did see exactly who had robbed him.\(^\text{113}\) In other trials the victims or witnesses said things like “it was light enough for me to discern their faces, I am sure the prisoners are the men,” or “it was a well moonlit night.”\(^\text{114}\) The shroud of night was important for robbers because it not only helped protect their identities, but it could also cast doubt on the testimony of those testifying against them.

However, as the above cases demonstrate, highwaymen and footpads could not always rely on the cover of darkness to conceal their identity. They in turn, looked for other ways to strengthen their chances of not getting caught. Joseph Levien was robbed while traveling in a “post-chaise and four” by two men, Thomas and Sylvester Smith,

\(^{113}\) Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 05 February 2013), December 1780, trial of WILLIAM THOMPSON otherwise BENNET (t17801206-12).

\(^{114}\) Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 18 January 2013), June 1780, trial of THOMAS KELLY ANDREW GRAY (t17800628-32); Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 22 January 2013), January 1790, trial of THOMAS NEWTON WILLIAM JONES JOHN DURHAM (t17900113-4).
armed with pistols and covering their faces with white handkerchiefs. The court found the two men guilty of the highway robbery of goods, including a watch and some money, for a total value of twenty-seven pounds, sixteen shillings, and six pennies.\textsuperscript{115}

In addition to the common disguise of handkerchiefs, robbers also used the “crape” in order to conceal their identity. Humphrey Owen, a Captain in the Corps of Royal Artillery, traveled by cart near Enfield-Chace Gate with a few other people when approached by a robber. The man who robbed him wore a “crape,” some cloth over the upper part of his face, and it extended down to the tip of his nose. Owen also stated that “there were two pieces of lead suspended to the crape to prevent its slapping about.” This security measure intended to prevent the crape from slipping off and revealing its secrets. The crape must have been effective, as the man who was accused of the crime, Richard Franklin was found not guilty of the highway robbery by the jury. However, later that year a jury found Franklin guilty of highway robbery, and this time a witness mentioned that he tried to put on a crape but the wind blew it off.\textsuperscript{116}

Highwaymen and footpads used other tools besides masks as they attempted to disguise themselves. Large jackets, hats, and even wigs were sometimes utilized in the course of their trade. According to Joseph Richards, the man who robbed him, Thomas Williams (also known as Charles Calloway) used a wig as part of his disguise. Richards said that when Williams was brought before the magistrates he had no doubt he was the man who robbed him, “he appears now in his third disguise; all that hair behind is false, it

\textsuperscript{115}Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 05 February 2013), April 1800, trial of THOMAS SMITH SYLVESTER SMITH (t18000402-12).

\textsuperscript{116}Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 05 February 2013), May 1800, trial of RICHARD FRANKLIN (t18000528-67); Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 05 February 2013), May 1800, trial of RICHARD FRANKLIN (t18000528-68).
is not his own hair, his own hair was very short and strait, there was not a crooked hair in his head.”¹¹⁷ The court often asked whether or not the victim had a clear view of the robbers’ faces during the crime; this repeated concern illustrates the importance the court placed on positively identifying the robbers as well as the proclivity of the use of disguises by highwaymen and footpads.

Disguises were important to robbers because their violent methods brought highwaymen and footpads in to close proximity with their victims. In accordance with the perceptions surrounding robbery, violence was front and center in almost every case of robbery and highway robbery that appeared in the Old Bailey trials. J.M. Beattie, who studied crime and the courts in Surrey and Sussex, states that for most of the eighteenth century, the crime that caused the most anxiety in England was robbery because it always involved a direct confrontation between the victim and their assailant, one which almost always “led to serious physical violence.” However, he states that most horror stories found in newspapers surround footpads, and he saw a discrepancy in the violence used depending on which type of robbery committed:

There was a broad distinction between street and highway robberies. The main differences were not so much the social difference between the highwayman and the footpad (as often said – though many highwaymen claimed to be gentlemen and few footpads were) but rather the difference that being on horseback or being on foot produced in the relationship

¹¹⁷ Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 05 February 2013), April 1780, trial of THOMAS WILLIAMS, otherwise CHARLES CALLOWAY (t17800405-16).
between the robber and his victim and the amount of violence that each thought it necessary to use.\textsuperscript{118}

Beattie states the difference between highwaymen and footpads stemmed from use of a horse by highwaymen and therefore highway robberies required less violence than street robberies by footpads. However in London and the end of the eighteenth century, violence remained prominent in almost all the court cases for both robberies and highway robberies, and in most instances the violence played to an equal degree no matter who committed the crime.

As in most of the robbery records, violence stood front and center in the highway robbery committed by Thomas Newton, William Jones and John Durham on the twenty-ninth of December. John Rawlings worked as a coachman, and on a brightly moon-lit night while traveling on foot the men robbed him at a place called Bloody Bridge. One of the men came up to him and said “damn you, where are you going in such a hurry?” Another man immediately struck Rawlings on the head with a bludgeon. As he lay bloody in a ditch, they rummaged through his pockets relieving him of a silver watch and few other small items valued at two pounds, three shillings and nine pennies.\textsuperscript{119}

The violence experienced during robberies extended beyond the mere physical aspect, as threats and violent language also seemed commonplace during these crimes. Numerous victims testified that their muggers bellowed out a few common expressions at them during their crimes. Very common phrases included variations of “damn your eyes” and “your money or your life,” the former of which appeared in the Newton, Jones, and Durham case. In addition to these two sayings, highwaymen and footpads did not

\textsuperscript{118} Beattie, \textit{Crime and Courts in England},

\textsuperscript{119} \textit{Old Bailey Proceedings Online} (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 28 January 2013), January 1790, trial of THOMAS NEWTON WILLIAM JONES JOHN DURHAM (t17900113-4).
shy away from making direct and specific threats on how they would harm their targets if the victims did not comply. In the same trial, Rawlins explained that one of his assailants said “he would kill me if I did not turn my head the other way,” and later when Rawlins begged for mercy the robber advised “damn your eyes I will take and kill you if you say another word.”

Apart from a few cases where those accused of robbery received a conviction of lesser crimes (stealing but not violently), one exception emerged in the records. In a previously discussed case, John East stopped the traveling engraver on the highway and demanded at gunpoint that he hand over his money or he would “blow his brains out.” Making this verbal threat seemed to be the extent of his violent actions. During his trial, after Brooke recapped what had happened to him out on the road, East asked him “Did I behave with any violence to you?” to which Brooke replied “no, he behaved quite to the contrary.” Brooke even recommended that East be granted mercy by the court, stating that after he and a witness had captured East and handed him over to the men at Bow Street he told East “he hoped he [East] would not be hanged.” Violence was not only central to how highwaymen and footpads committed their crime, it also held a central role in the robbery trials at the Old Bailey courthouse.

The Aftermath

The Old Bailey has been known by many names throughout its existence including Justice Hall, the Sessions House, and the Central Criminal Court of England.

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and Wales. Likewise, it changed and underwent renovations throughout its long career stretching back to medieval times. These changes ranged from as extreme as a complete reconstruction in 1673 after being destroyed by the 1666 Great Fire of London, to a much simpler facelift in 1774 to increase security and control public access. However one thing remained constant, the courthouse was located on a street that followed the original fortified wall, or “bailey” of London, and it is from this “Old Bailey Street” that the most common name of the courthouse originated.121

Despite the fact that the building itself had been rebuilt or modified a few times — the courtrooms themselves maintained a basic design philosophy over time. Prior to 1824, the courthouse contained only a single courtroom in which, no matter the decoration, the interior layout always remained arranged in a similar pattern. Clive Emsley, Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker state in their “History of The Old Bailey Courthouse,” the layout of the courtroom was intended to “emphasize the contest between the accused and the rest of the court.” As depicted in the drawing to the right, when robbers came to trial, they stood at “the bar” (also known as “the dock”) perched over the sea of everyone else involved in the case.

Fig. 16
Thomas Rowlandson and Augustus Pugin’s depiction of a trial inside The Old Bailey courtroom entitled simply “Old Bailey” (1808) found in The Microcosm of London Volume 2 (1904) by Rudolph Ackerman, William Henry Pyne, and William Combe. Image courtesy of the Wikimedia Commons [public domain].

Before gas lighting made its way into the courtroom in the early nineteenth century, a mirror situated above the bar reflected light from the windows onto the accused robber, so that all those in attendance could see the truth in their face. In order to amplify the robber’s testimony, the court placed a sounding board overhead. The witnesses testified directly in front of the accused in the appropriately titled “witness box,” with the jury seated beside. The jury sat to the right of the robber (in every trial after 1737), and close enough to each other so that after the prosecutor, the witnesses, and the defendant testified, they then huddled together and came to a verdict without even leaving the courtroom. The judges sat at the opposite end of the room from the robber with the clerks, lawyers, and the writers seated underneath them, so that the judge could look straight at the robber when they delivered the sentence. These court writers sat below the judges and took the notes that would later be turned into The Proceedings of the Old Bailey.¹²² Some trials had defendants trying to argue and prove their innocence, while in many others the defendants seemed non-compliant, and simply refused to comment on the matter, while others still insisted they had no knowledge of anything the victims or witnesses claimed to happen.

The accused usually began by proclaiming their innocence. In most of the trials the defense testimony simply reads “I know nothing of the matter,” “I am innocent of it, as the child unborn,” or sometimes they would give an alibi or story about where they were at the time. In the trial of Thomas Kelly and Andrew Gray, Gray used the exact statement “I am as innocent of it as a child unborn” in the opening of his defense.¹²³

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¹²² Ibid.
¹²³ Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 14 April 2013), June 1780, trial of THOMAS KELLY ANDREW GRAY (t17800628-32).
Many times the accused robbers called on “character witnesses” who testified about the accused’s employment, trustworthiness, and honesty. These defense testimonies showed up in almost every case, and usually involved more than one individual character witness. The heavy reliance on character witnesses demonstrated the importance of an individual’s “character” in London society. A prisoner found guilty by the jury may have been more likely to be recommended for mercy from the death penalty, if they were believed to be industrious, honorable individuals – not that this mercy was always granted by the Judge in sentencing. Andrew Gray called in three character defense witnesses (his Sergeant, and two other men who belonged to the same regiment) all of whom stated that Gray served as a soldier with great character and “never knew anything bad of him.” Nonetheless, Gray was sentenced to death by the Judge.\(^\text{124}\)

Out of all the cases surveyed, the trial of John East seemed to be the full of the most exceptions – to the rule that robbery involved violence, to the age cluster that most robbers at the time fit in, and in his confession and expression of remorse he seemed to be the only one of those indicted for robbery or highway robbery who not only confessed what he had done, but seemed remorseful of it. East seemed a very desperate and distraught man at the time of his crime. Evidence of this distress appeared in the defense testimony he gave at his trial:

> I was going to Kentish-town, and I met that gentleman upon the bridge; I told him I was very much distrest, and asked him to give me a trisle; he said he had no halfpence, and then I stopped him; he cried out stop thief; and that young man came up; I went very quietly with him, and never offered to meddle with his watch; I had just burried my wife, and got two

\(^{124}\) Ibid.
children; I was very much distrest; the spring of the pistol is broke; I had it to mount; I little thought of doing such a thing as I have done.125

Despite this desperation John East, like many other robbers tried at the Old Bailey, was sentenced to death.

Robbers faced very severe punishments if captured and convicted. Just over seventy percent of those convicted of robbery or highway robbery received the death sentence, and almost twenty percent were transported as their punishment – in total around 613 people total. Before 1783, a robber sentenced to death likely had their punishment carried out through a hanging at Tyburn (where the Marble Arch stands today in London). A great public spectacle, hangings seemed to have been intended to deter would-be footpads and highwaymen from choosing that way of life.

125 Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 14 April 2013), December 1800, trial of JOHN EAST (t18001203-22).
Capital punishment accounted for around between sixty and eighty percent of all punishments each year for those found guilty of these two crimes. The discussion of punishments almost always appeared in the court records only in the from a simple listing of “Guilty (Death)” at the end of the transcripts, as in the case of Richard Collins that opened this chapter.\footnote{Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 15 April 2013), September 1780, trial of THOMAS HUMPHREYS (t17800913-102).} After the procession of criminals from Newgate prison to Tyburn, the prisoners were blindfolded and placed in a horse drawn cart. A noose was placed around their neck. The horses then pulled the cart away, slowly and excruciatingly strangling the robbers to death. This changed in 1783, when hangings were carried out by “the sharp drop,” which involved the condemned standing on a small platform with a noose around their neck before the platform opened and they still slowly strangled to death. The processions to Tyburn also ceased that year and hangings began to take place.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Fig18.png}
\caption{“Hanging outside Newgate.” Illustration from an unknown author in the early years of the nineteenth century. Depicts the “short drop” method as opposed to the older horse cart method used at Tyburn shown in the previous picture. Large crowds are present in both illustrations. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons [public domain].}
\end{figure}
outside Newgate Prison. Hangings were still a public affair until 1868 when public executions stopped altogether and were moved inside the prison.\textsuperscript{127}

While the number of death sentences may have declined over a long period of time for more “minor” offences, those for robbery and highway robbery remained consistent over twenty years at the end of the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{128} The other punishments footpads and highwaymen faced included, most commonly transportation, but also fines, whipping, and occasionally brief imprisonment. The court often only assigned these punishments to robbers “convicted of stealing, but not violently.” For example, John Herman who at age sixteen, snatched the package from his victim, but did not directly use violence or the threat of violence, was found “guilty of stealing, but not violently” and sentenced him to transportation for no less than seven years.\textsuperscript{129}

\textbf{Causes and Conclusions}

The voices captured in the Old Bailey Courthouse records for robbery and highway robbery seemed to create a profile of highwaymen and footpads as young men, whose employment generally remained unknown, but when it appeared, often reflected service in the military. These robbers usually – but not exclusively – operated in gangs, and used violence to instill fear in their victims. They wore disguises as well as attacked


\textsuperscript{128} My own research has been more of a snapshot of one point in time, while Beattie is looking at change over a long period of time and is in a better position to speak to a change over hundreds of years. He says the number of capital punishments declined over time.

\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Old Bailey Proceedings Online} (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 22 January 2013), October 1800, trial of JOHN HERMAN (t18001029-34).
at night in order to increase the odds of their success. These robbers established networks with prostitutes, alehouses, pawnshops, and workhouses in order to scout targets, find new prospective members for gangs, or get rid of stolen items and attempt to escape custody. Highwaymen and footpads faced severe punishments following a conviction, and therefore almost never admitted their guilt. Instead they usually represented themselves in court, claimed innocence and brought character defense witnesses. The stories of who, where, how, and what happened, to highwaymen and footpads raise several questions about the relationship between crime and London social structure in the late eighteenth century.

The first question that emerges from these stories is why were so many robbers young? The robbers’ youth gave them the physical prowess to “rob” or commit theft with violence. Footpads and highwaymen needed to be able to overpower and forcibly obtain their bounty to be accused as robbers. Even if the robber was armed and did not need strength to relieve the targets of their goods, they needed to be athletic enough to attempt an escape, which usually involved some sort of pursuit. Humphreys, Damant, Mitton, and Read all overpowered and took hold of their targets, and after each crime a chase ensued. Athleticism and strength did not guarantee success however, and each of these cases resulted in the apprehension of the footpads or highwaymen.

Defendants at the Old Bailey were rarely criminal recidivists. The same robber did not often appear multiple times in court, and in fact out of the 125 cases sampled for this study only five repeat offenders appeared. If captured as young men or women and convicted of robbery they were executed or transported. In either case, they likely never returned to the Old Bailey to stand trial for another robbery. One who did not return was
Thomas Humphreys whose trial for the robbery of Richard Collins opened the chapter.\textsuperscript{130} Later Humphreys was found guilty of robbing William Binsley at Holburn Bridge and sentenced to death.\textsuperscript{131}

Highwaymen and footpads did face a severe threat of punishment at the end of the eighteenth century. While the number of capital punishments did not fluctuate greatly in the twenty year span I focused on in this project. J. M. Beattie claims in *Crime and the Courts in England* that a disenchantment with capital punishment spread throughout England in the 1780s and 90s, accompanied by a loss of faith in hanging as a deterrent. More and more people began to believe “minor offenders” would not be deterred by fear. He sees this change as part of a larger growing abhorrence to violence over time in the minds of Londoners.\textsuperscript{132} Michel Foucault, who focused on the history of western penal systems (especially France) in *Discipline and Punish*, described this shift as it occurred more broadly in Europe as not humanitarian in nature. Rather, it stemmed from an attempt to make punishment more egalitarian in its application and shift the balance of power from a strong central monarchy to more a more evenly distributed punitive system; as well as shift the target of punishment from the body to the soul.\textsuperscript{133} In the robbery cases heard at the Old Bailey, the use of capital punishment remained consistent.

Londoners, and the courts, saw robbery as a great enough threat to their livelihood and personal safety to continue issuing the death sentence.

\textsuperscript{130} *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 15 April 2013), September 1780, trial of THOMAS HUMPHREYS (t17800913-102).

\textsuperscript{131} *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 15 April 2013), May 1780, trial of THOMAS HUMPHREYS THOMAS JOHNS (t17800510-33).


One young man whose case I discussed earlier, sixteen-year-old, John Herman gave a defense testimony that brought up another interesting facet of robbery. He stated that someone had him steal the bundle and bring it to him. Whether or not he told the truth is hard to say, however, if he did, it would be interesting to discover if this man embodied the *artful dodger* or *Fagin* in this *Oliver Twist*–esque tale. Charles Dickens may have written *Oliver Twist* as a work of fiction, but the story of a poor orphan boy raised in a workhouse, who is taught the criminal ways by two people, the elder criminal expert – Fagin – and the leader of gang of adolescence thieves – the Artful Dodger, could just as easily have been the early modern London equivalent of a modern true crime drama.\(^{134}\)

The second question that arises from the robbery trials is what was the relationship between the economic structures of the city and rates of robbery? Unemployed soldiers returning home may have been one contributing factor to crime rates, but one thing was certain, robberies and highway robberies occurred more frequently when the British Empire lived in peace than when it engaged in war. The four years from 1783 to 1787, a time of relative overseas peace for the empire\(^ {135}\) saw a four-fold increase in the number of crimes – 546 total – compared with the 537 robberies and highway robberies that occurred during the surrounding sixteen years from 1780 to 1782 and 1788 to 800.

However, unemployment did not directly drive people to commit robberies. Not all of the sixteen soldiers tried for robberies in the legal proceedings looked at for this

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134 Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist: or the Parish Boy’s Progress* (London: Richard Bentley, 1837).
135 Wars that the British Empire took place in between 1780 and 1800: 1775-1782 Mahatta War; 1775-1783 American Revolution, French, Spanish, Dutch Wars; 1780-1784 2nd Mysore War; 1790-1792 3rd Mysore War; 1793-1815 Coalition Wars Against France; and the 1798 Irish Rebellion; Bernard Grum, *The Timetables of History, 3rd Ed.* (New York: Touchstone, 1991), 358-382.
study committed their crimes during peacetime. A few of these men struck while still employed and simply on shore leave. They may have thought that (perhaps like the fishermen who robbed) soon they would be back on the sea and none would be the wiser. Some of their trials suggest these military men may have just thought robbery seemed like an easy way to make money, and believed they could get away with it. Whatever the contributing factors may have been, the research does show that in peacetime robberies and highway robberies occurred with much more frequency than they did during times of war. However, evidence for the exact cause of this shift does not appear in the court records.

The third question is what do spaces of criminal activity tell us about connections between networks of crime and society? In The Thieves Opera, Lucy Moore uses the colloquial term “bastard sanctuary” to describe areas like Covent Garden. Scattered around the capital, she argues that these areas became known hotbeds of criminal activity, and housed thieves, debtors, prostitutes, and escaped criminals and transportees. Like Covent Garden, areas such Smithfield, Holburn, Whitefriars, and “Thieving Lane” in Westminster were at one point in their lives monasteries. After the dissolution of these monasteries, they maintained some of their “ancient liberties,” even into the early eighteenth century, which included legal sanctuary – “constables, martials, and even militia dared not enter these areas.”

Current sociological explanations for criminal behavior, similar to Moore’s “bastard sanctuaries,” emphasize the social space in which crime takes place. One group

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136 Moore, Thieves Opera, 128.
advancing this category of is the Chicago School of Sociology and Criminology.¹³⁷ The Chicago School argues that social life in certain areas and neighborhoods can be “chaotic and pathological” and that in such situations crime is “an excepted and normal response.”¹³⁸ A relationship existed between a higher concentration of robbery and areas notorious for a higher concentration of prostitution and criminal activity other than robbery, such as Covent Garden. This relationship suggests that robbers had a tendency to rob in areas where other criminal activity took place, and that on a larger scale criminal activity generally concentrated in London in specific areas. This relationship may have existed because robbers created networks with other types of criminals that they believed allowed them greater success in their criminal endeavors, or simply because of a large amount of foot traffic in these areas. Money changed hands in these areas for businesses such as markets, prostitution, alehouses, and theaters and this could be the main reason crimes occurred in these areas. However, further research needs to be done in the future to examine the space and geography of crime in London.

Finally the study of robbery trials raises questions about how representative of crime and criminals the perceptions were. One area of theses representations was the romanticizing of highwaymen. In my cases they were not romantic wealthy gentlemen. Class distinctions did not seem to exist between highwaymen and footpads in London around the end of the eighteenth century. While there surely must have been some instances of the “honorable, noble highwayman” in order to create and perpetuate this stereotype, the trials conducted at the Old Bailey suggest that at the end of the nineteenth century.

century this was not the case. Lucy Moore, who focused her study of theft on the early part of the eighteenth century, argued that highwaymen, more than any other criminal at the time, embodied the ideal of a noble, honorable outlaw. The highwaymen shared the same traits as a gentlemen at the time: “horsemanship, courage, the ability to handle weapons well, wit and eloquence with which to disarm his victims, a certain insouciance, a sense of humor.” She states that both men of “gentle birth” and “common birth” chose this life of crime over other forms because they could take pride and be exalted for their work.139 The highwaymen tried at the Old Bailey in London between 1780 and 1800 do not support Moore’s conclusions.

“Highway Robbery” literally meant a robbery that took place on or near the King’s Highway. While these crimes often took place on the outskirts of London, robberies on many of the streets of London fell into this category because one of the Transportation Acts re-categorized these streets as king’s highways. Emsley, Hitchcock, and Shoemaker, on the Old Bailey Online, contend that while many highway robbers travelled on horseback, “the tradition of the ‘polite’ gentleman highway robber was not always realized in practice.”140 The polite gentleman highway robber seemed completely absent in the court cases of the latter part of the eighteenth century. Violence always appeared as part of the robbery whether on foot or on horseback, and the only real difference seemed to be the same one found in the legal definition of highway robbery, that it took place on a king’s highway – and the case of London that more than likely just meant a robbery on the street.

139 Moore, Thieves’ Opera, 133-4.
The next chapter will continue to examine the Old Bailey court records, but this time the focus of the examination will shift to the victims of robbery, who they were and how they dealt with robberies at the time. A similar structure occurs in the next chapter with the creation of a profile (this time of victims), in order to discover who in London was more likely to become the victim of a robbery at the time.
Fig. 19
On November 1st, 1800, John-Prade Halliday, a Black servant of a Parson Argoyne, set out from Portman Square to run a few errands for his master. Later in court, he recounted the events that took place that evening between six and seven o’clock when Mary Oakes beat and robbed him at knife point. Halliday lost his silver watch to Oakes, which he valued at two pounds and two shillings.

With Oakes gone, Halliday told the court he found a few watchmen and patrols in the area, and explained to them about the robbery. After he reported the crime, Halliday then finished the tasks for his master, then went with a fellow servant to hunt down the woman and recover his watch. First he checked with the watchmen, but they had no new updates about the woman who robbed him. Halliday then asked the watchmen for the names of nearby pawnbrokers.

First he checked in with the pawnbroker’s at Nottingham Street, but the proprietor had no knowledge of the watch, the woman, or the crime. Next, the two servants visited a pawn shop on South Street. Halliday described his watch to the pawnbroker, who replied that a woman did pawn a watch like the one he described “and had not been gone out three minutes.” John Price, the pawnbroker at this pawnshop, claimed that the woman had pledged the watch to him around seven that evening and said it belonged to her husband Daniel Oakes. Using directions supplied by Price, the servants then went to number 15 York Court, East Street, and found Mary Oakes concealed up in a garret. 141 Halliday found a nearby constable and the two men and, along with the other servant,

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took Oakes into custody. The constable then took her to Timothy Corbett (the watchman of St. Mary-le-bonne, and the closest one available) who searched Oakes and her house.

Oakes showed no remorse when taken into custody or when she testified in court. When Corbett questioned Mary Oakes at her house, she arrogantly asked the watchman if he wanted the “black b-r:’s watch,” stated that she had pawned it for a guinea, and that Corbett should sit down and eat some and let the “black b-r go to hell.” In response to these remarks Corbett arrested Mary Oakes. John-Prade Halliday’s persistence in his pursuit of the person who robbed him, combined with his testimony in court was representative of many Londoners who had been attacked by footpads and highwaymen at the time, and it led to the conviction of Oakes, the woman who robbed him.142

In eighteenth-century London, robberies involved many more people than just the men and women who used the crimes as their source of income. The previous chapter explored the world of the robbers themselves. In this chapter I look at the individual experiences of those on the other side of the law. It centers primarily on of the victims of robbery, but similar to the last chapter, it takes the victims and the robberies as an entry point to networks of crime stoppers including young but growing policing organizations and the courts. An analysis of court cases shows that while the civil authorities seemed important in some of these robbery cases, the robbed often played the pivotal role themselves in bringing those who wronged them to justice.

142 Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 09 March 2013), December 1800, trial of MARY OAKES (t18001203-29).
This chapter is divided into four sections that consider robberies from the other side of the law than that in the previous chapter. This chapter begins with a demographic analysis of the victims of robberies. I then look at how the victims responded to the crimes and what happened after the robberies took place. The third part of the chapter centers on the role that legal and law enforcement institutions held in the apprehension and prosecution of robbers. Finally, I look at what happened in court, and the role of the victim as prosecutor.

The court records suggest that the victims of robbery were of various kinds that included members of all communities of London. Because highwaymen and footpads did not seem discriminatory in their selection of who they robbed, anyone, anywhere could have been a potential victim, male or female, rich or poor, young or old. During the crime, Londoners who became victims of robberies were often subjected to violence and verbal abuse, and many times they did not come away from the incident unscathed. However, afterwards these victims usually showed tremendous fortitude in their attempts to bring those who had robbed them to justice.

**A Crime Against Everyone**

The fact that no class or demographic group seemed safe or exempt from the threat of robbery, and that anyone could have been a potential victim, may have been one of the main factors that contributed to the perception of the great scourge that highwaymen and footpads enacted upon the streets of London.
London evolved into a very diverse metropolis in the late eighteenth century, and by the 1770s two out of three Londoners were born outside of the city. Lucy Moore, in *Thieves Opera*, does not distinguish whether or not more of these immigrants came from elsewhere in England or from further away, however she does state that it did not seem uncommon for Londoners to have seen and interacted with “exotic nationalities” on the streets of the capital.\textsuperscript{143} In the aftermath of the Seven Years War in 1763 and American Revolutionary War in 1783, a large number of black men and women came to London from Africa, the Caribbean, and North America. This influx of people increased the population of the black community in London in the last quarter of the eighteenth century to between 5,000 and 10,000 (out of a total population of 1,096,784 according to the 1801 census). As stated in the previous chapter, the population of London tended be younger and have a higher ratio of women to men (54% women in 1801), than elsewhere in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{144}

All classes used the roads in London that held the distinction of King’s Highway on a daily basis. Therefore members of all these classes presented themselves as potential paydays to robbers perched nearby. Victims of robberies could have been very wealthy, or like John-Prade Halliday, they could have been servants – some appeared even less well off financially then him. Highwaymen and footpads, may have set out to make as much money as possible, but they did not turn down a potential payday – even a small one – when a poor Londoner came across them on the road. As mentioned in the previous chapter, J.M. Beattie states that he believes the two main differences existed


between highwaymen and footpads. First, that highwaymen usually attacked on horseback and used less violence than footpads. Second, Beattie states that since most footpads approached their targets on foot, most of their targets ended up being workingmen, servants, and women; however, highwaymen were more selective about their victims and directed their attacks at rich and wealthy travelers.\(^{145}\) Beattie’s analysis portrays the victims of robbery and highway robbery as primarily coming from certain demographic groups and he says these trends stemmed from the differences in how these crimes played out. However, the robbed in London at the end of the eighteenth century do not fit into the model Beattie sees in Surrey and Sussex from 1660 to 1800.

One of the reasons why Beattie’s findings differ from my own study, is the location he concentrates on – the counties of Surrey and Sussex. His study not only looks at urban and commercialized agricultural areas, but also the more rural parishes of Surrey and Sussex. This meant that highwaymen, or those men who committed robberies on the king’s highways, may have been more likely to use horses in these wide open spaces. Beattie’s highwaymen may have also spent more time selecting their targets, and chose to rob from predominantly

wealthy individuals, letting the workingmen, servants, and women go about their business.

However, as previously noted, in the capital of London, many of the main roads that went through the busy city were designated as king’s highways. Therefore, in London, the differences between highwaymen and footpads boiled down to merely the legal definition, and where the crime occurred – whether or not it occurred on one of the king’s roads. Those men and women accused of highway robbery seemed just as likely to hide nearby and attack on foot in the city, than to rob on horseback. Those robbed by either highwaymen or footpads in greater London had just as good a chance of being working men and women or servants as they had of being wealthy Londoners.

The story of the robbery that opened this chapter chronicled the robbery of a servant, John-Prade Halliday, and numerous cases discussed in the last chapter detailed the robberies of working class Londoners. The case of William Smith provided another example of a non-wealthy Londoner who joined the ranks of those robbed in the late eighteenth century. Around 2 o’clock at night, as Smith traveled by coach along Long Acre, a main thoroughfare in London, John Kettleby approached the glass of the coach and asked about its inhabitants. Smith replied “no one at all,” but he received a pistol in his face and a threat from the highwayman who demanded, “give me your watches and money, or I will shoot you in the head.” Smith pleaded with the robber that had no money or watches, being a simple poor man. Kettleby spotted something in William Smith’s hands and demanded he surrender it. Smith beseeched the robber that it he only carried a bundle that contained two horse-cloths (used to cover a horse) valued only at 16 pennies. Kettleby took it anyway, and again demanded money and watches, Smith
replied again that neither he nor the driver of the coach had either, and so Kettleby moved toward the door of the coach. Smith later in his testimony at the Old Bailey recounted that at this moment he thought they would die if he came in, and so he “jumped off the coach-box and laid hold of him by the right hand and got him somehow on the ground. I found he was very strong and I called to the coachman who was along with me to help me as soon as possible… I called to the watchman; he came… the prisoner was very strong; I was afraid he would get from me; I secured him and took this pistol from him.”

The robbery of William Smith seemed representative of other low income victims of robbery at the time. The case demonstrated that even after Smith asserted to Kettleby that he did not have money or anything worth a great deal of money, the robber persisted. It also demonstrated the fear of highwaymen and footpad that even lower class citizens of London felt as they traveled the streets. The fact that they did not carry items worth much money did not make them safe from an attack.

Not even children or the elderly seemed exempt from the risk of robbery in London. While the age of the victim did not often show up in the trials, out of the 125 cases of robbery I read, a handful specifically described the robbed as either a child or an elderly person. Twelve-year-old Charles Heath became one of those robbed children around two in the afternoon on Saturday January 9, 1790. On that day Charles Heath set out to carry some linen to Whitechapel from Watling Street for a man he lived with, a linen-draper named Samuel Garrard. Heath met two men along the way, whom he had never seen before, and asked them how to get to his destination. The two strangers told Charles Heath that they were headed that way as well and would show him how to get

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146 Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 12 March 2013), January 1780, trial of JOHN KETTLEBY (t17800112-21).
there. They asked how heavy the parcel felt, and then offered to carry it for the boy. Charles Heath refused and then one of the men took a hold of him and then took the bundle from him. They also took away a letter he carried, opened it “almost tore it to pieces,” and then they ran away. Charles Heath ran from the area until he finally came across a patrol who eventually caught one of the men, Asher Pollock, and recovered the cotton, calico, and linen worth a total of 57 shillings and 18 pence.

A child victim or witness posed special problems for the court. When a child such as Charles Heath came before the Old Bailey to testify as to what happened, whether a victim or a witness, the first question asked of them centered on if they knew the meaning of an oath. In the case of Charles Heath, the court asked him “Do you know the consequence of telling a lye?” Charles replied “Yes. If I tell a lye, I must go to the devil.” In the court records I studied this pattern repeated itself over and over. The court asked the child if they knew the meaning of an oath, and the child replied with some variation of biblical punishment. This pattern suggested a degree of the importance of religion and virtues in the early childhood education of Londoners, since each child demonstrated that they understood and feared the consequences as well as an understanding of the concept of honesty in court.  

Race, like age, presented another demographic attribute of the robbed that rarely appeared in the transcripts of the Old Bailey trials. However, one example of a case where race came up in discussion more than once happened in the robbery of John-Prade Halliday – the story that opened this chapter. In this case, the woman convicted of highway robbery, Mary Oakes, appeared to look down on the servant Halliday, not

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147 Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 12 March 2013), January 1790, trial of ASHER POLLOCK (t17900113-35).

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because of his job or status, but because of his race. She not only threatened his life with a knife, but also yelled defamatory remarks like “you black devil” at him. Moreover, she seemed surprised that anyone else cared about Halliday’s watch or well-being when the patrols came to arrest her for what she called “that black’s watch.” She even told the watchmen “let the black bastard go to hell” and asked the watchman if he wanted to sit down for some food and drink. Oakes seemed like the only one involved in the case who showed any discrimination, as neither the court officials nor the watchmen seemed to look down on Halliday the way she did, and both appeared as if they really did want to help him.\footnote{Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 09 March 2013), December 1800, trial of MARY OAKES (t18001203-29).} Aside from the trial of the robbery of Halliday, discussion of race seemed very rare elsewhere in the Old Bailey records.

The support and testimony of the watchmen, and the court proceedings in the Halliday case may seem to suggest that racism did not seem strong in London at the time, but the evidence only shows that the crime of robbery may have trumped racial differences as a sign of social division. The absence of a discussion of race in courts in turn might also have very well been an indication of racism at the time, if non-white victims or robbers never showed up in court, or did not receive as much access to the same legal resources. As I state in the last chapter in regards to the discussion of the race and immigration of robbers at the time, I would like to see more research into crime in the race and immigrant communities at the time, to determine if there existed a lack of racial diversity in the people appearing in court at the time, or simply a lack of references to race.
Of all the victims in robbery cases heard at the Old Bailey between the years of 1780 and 1800, at least 112 were female – more than thirteen percent. Women not only robbed men, but also subjected other women to violence in the course of robberies at the time. Robbers, male or female, did not specifically target women in London, but they did not pass up on a potential victim if the opportunity presented itself. Therefore, violence against women, in the case of robbery, seems to have been more a case of wrong place, wrong time, than a deliberate use of violence as a form of sexual antagonism. As discussed in the previous chapter, J.M. Beattie explores women’s role in crimes and how it differed from men’s criminal activity at the time. However, Beattie does not shift his attention and explore in as much detail the victims of crimes at the time. Judith R. Walkowitz explores gender in late-Victorian London, first in her 1982 article “Jack the Ripper and the Myth of Male Violence,” and ten years later in her book *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*. In her research, which explores women as victims of crimes in nineteenth century London, she uses female victims as a portal into the attitudes surrounding gender in Early Modern and Modern England. Walkowitz, in “Jack the Ripper,” first argues that prostitutes as well as non-prostitutes “inhabited a distinct female world, where they gossiped, entertained each other, and participated in an intricate system of borrowing and lending.” She argues that this female network augmented women’s “heterosexual ties,” and occasionally even subverted male-female “allegiances.” With regards to the Ripper murders specifically,

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149 *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0, 17 April 2011), Tabulating total violent theft (all subcategories) against victim gender, between 1780 and 1800. Counting by victim; Not all cases had a victim show up, or their gender was not recorded, the total number of victims who showed up and had their gender counter was 836. That is why in this paragraph it states, at least 112 were female.  
Walkowitz contends that the slayings may not have increased violence against women directly, but they “covertly sanctioned” male aggression and authority over women. She states that the ripper episode established a “common vocabulary and iconography of male violence.”

While overall in her “Jack the Ripper” article Walkowitz concentrated more on class divisions and a social analysis of the murders, in *City of Dreadful Delight* she applies to late-Victorian London an analytical approach that is more cultural and discursive focused. She argues that a complicated ethical nature of the city existed, and the dichotomies of regular society and underworld, or private and public, could not sufficiently describe it. Walkowitz also argues that the boundaries between public and private space became blurred, and women occupied an important place in this grey area. Women entered the workforce more and more, and women faced a growing sexual danger that accompanied in their expanding interactions with men.

Walkowitz’s work examines London almost a hundred years after the London I study, but many of the topics such as violence against women, women entering a more public arena and women having more interactions with male strangers did not appear to be a new or exclusive phenomenon to Late-Victorian London. Evidence of these interactions existed in the court records of robbery in the late eighteenth century as well. In the previous chapter, I touched on prostitution and women who entered a more public role, but focusing on women who took on the role of robber. However, women’s

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interactions with men also led to “sexual danger” and violence directed at women as victims of robberies.

The trial for the robbery of Ann Marsano, who became one of these victims on November 9, 1780, offers a representation of the gender issues that emerged in robbery trial records at the time. Ann, who married an Italian merchant, lived in Thanet Place near Temple Bar in London. During her defense testimony, Ann retold the events that occurred around eight o’clock that night as she walked near Palsgrave Place, when she noticed some people close behind her. Once she turned around she encountered two young men named Joseph Cook and John Thomas. Cook greeted her and asked her for a glass of wine. Ann replied “go home and mind [your] master’s business.” Following Ann’s retort, Cook immediately snatched her by the throat and dragged her up the street. Ann told the court that he seized her so tight by the throat that she could not even cry out for help as he dragged her towards Twining’s Tea Warehouse. Ann Marsano then explained that Cook bent her over “and behaved very indecently with his other hand. Then he took his left hand from my petticoats; and kneeled his knee upon my back and bent me down to the ground; and then turned my pockets inside out.” Cook stole eight or nine shillings from Marsano, before he took off down the highway. John Thomas apparently sat by and watched the whole thing, as he “laughed as if he enjoyed the sport” of it (as a fourteen year old boy who witnesses the crime described it in his testimony). A constable named Matthew Swift first took John Thomas into custody. Because he turned on his partner and gave up Cook’s location, earning favor with the court and jury who later found Thomas not guilty. When Joseph Cook was brought before the court he said that he was “very much in liquor” and that he “took her for a woman of the town.” He
then declared that he did not rob her and knew nothing of the matters she described in the trial. However the jury found Ann Marsano’s testimony more convincing and convicted Cook.153

Cook’s nonchalance, and Thomas’s amusement “at the sport” echoed Walkowitz’s discussion of the “sexual dangers” women faced later in London. The central part of Cook’s defense seemed to revolve around his portrayal of Ann Marsano as a prostitute, demonstrated that he believed the jury would view his violence against a women who worked as a prostitute as not reproachable. Cook’s attitude appeared very similar to some of the sensationalist newspapers that covered the Jack the Ripper murders whose authors blamed “deviant” “women of evil life” for bringing the murders on themselves.154 However, the court records suggest that robbers (who as previously stated seemed predominantly male) did not specifically target women, nor did women seem subject to more or less violence in robberies then men – and in fact they made up only a small percentage of those robbed in late eighteenth century London, despite the fact they accounted for over half of the overall population of the city. Though in some instances of male robbers attacking females, as in the case of Ann Marsano, the violence may have played in out in a more sexual nature. In addition to this, the court records did not seem to demonstrate any discrepancy between the power men and women both held in court. As shown in the case of Ann Marsano, the court and the jury treated the testimonies of the prosecutors, witnesses and defendants equal regardless of their gender.

153 Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 13 March 2013), December 1780, trial of JOSEPH COOK JOHN THOMAS (t17801206-23).

In summary, the court records suggest that nobody seemed safe from robbers around the end of the eighteenth century in London. In the cases that made it to trial at the Old Bailey, the robbed appear to come from all demographic groups and communities of London. Discussions of age and race did not often appear in the court records, and women seemed to only make up approximately thirteen percent of those robbed. However, members of different races, genders, and classes all appeared in the trial records which may have contributed to the fear of highwaymen and footpads, and the perception that nobody seemed safe.

**Fighting Back**

As the robbery of John-Prade Halliday, and many other cases already discussed, demonstrated the robbed often played an important role in the apprehension and trial of the person who robbed them. In the aftermath of the crime, the fear of highwaymen and footpads seemed to have subsided in their victims, and the balance of power shifted from the robbers to the robbed, who now set out to bring their attackers to justice.

According to the historian Robert Shoemaker, the street played host to the main site for the resolution of conflicts in early eighteenth-century London. He does however state that by the end of the century a development and professionalization of policing forces began to emerge. Shoemaker suggests that these administrative institutions began to replace the need for Londoners to police their own streets. However, later in his study he complicates the situation further by stating that Londoners did not always seem willing to involve the law. Therefore, the place of law enforcement may have changed in
London society over the course of the eighteenth century, but the streets, and non-criminal Londoners remained important in their personal battle with the criminals who attacked them.\textsuperscript{155}

The Old Bailey proceedings contain numerous examples of victims of robberies cried out “stop thief!” to secure help from on-lookers or nearby pedestrians. These good Samaritans responded to the call and a pursuit ensued leading to the capture of the highwaymen or footpads. Those victims who apprehended robbers in this manner brought them before a constable or justice of the peace for arrest and detainment.\textsuperscript{156}

An example of this street justice occurred on the 15\textsuperscript{th} of October in the year 1800 with the robbery of Michael Hodgson. Hodgson told the court that during the middle of the day, he rode a horse out to the northern outskirts of the city along Maiden Lane (a main road which ran from the turnpike at Gray’s Inn Lane to Highgate). Once Hodgson neared Highgate, Thomas Williams and Thomas Nerod (whose alias was also Thomas Williams)

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{cruelty_in_perfection.png}
\caption{William Hogarth’s “Four Stages of Cruelty – Cruelty in Perfection” (1751) showed a group of Londoner’s investigating the scene of a robbery and murder. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons [public domain].}
\end{figure}


approached him on foot. Once Williams got within about ten yards of Michael Hodgson’s horse he ran up to his left side, brandishing a large pistol, and seized Hodgson’s horse. The robbers forcibly relieved Hodgson of four one pound bank notes, his watch (worth eight pounds), and his spectacles (worth five shillings). After the robbery, Hodgson claimed that the robbers pointed his horse in the direction of Highgate, and the two Thomases headed off the opposite direction toward inner London, but after twenty or so yards they took off across some fields. No more than a minute after the robbers ran off, a gentleman’s servant named James White came riding up to him “as hard as he could ride.”

Hodgson said that, with some difficulty, he stopped White who agreed to assist him, and they took off on their horses in pursuit of the footpads. Hodgson then began cry out “stop thief!” and “footpads!” Upon this, the two robbers turned around and ran even faster. Hodgson and White pursued Williams and Nerod over two more fields while the robbers shouted back at them, “keep off, or we will shoot.” A few men in the process of making hay in the fields joined in the pursuit, and sometime after they passed through another field one of the two footpads fired a shot. Hodgson later told the court that at this point he knew “they were desperate, and that there would be no taking them without some firearms.” He instructed some of the men who had joined the pursuit to go to nearby Holloway or somewhere else close and secure some arms. In the meantime, the other men continued to chase the robbers in circles throughout the fields. The two robbers then crossed the street heading towards Kentish-town, when at last a man appeared at the top of the hill with a gun.
Hodgson then cried out loudly “here is a gun, give it me, and I will blow their heads off.” Once the robbers had “felt” the gun (assuming this means heard a shot, as no reports mentioned either Williams or Nerod being injured) they surrendered. When Hodgson and his associates finally reached the robbers the two men laid down three pistols and Hodgson tied them together with a handkerchief. The other men there searched Williams and Nerod, but apart from the spectacles, they recovered none of the stolen property. The robbers must have stashed Hodgson’s belongings at some point during the pursuit. Early the following morning, Hodgson took the two men to Bow Street, and then returned to the fields to try and find his possessions. However, the spectacles remained the only thing he managed to recover thanks to a boy named Thomas Watson who found them in the field where Hodgson apprehended the robbers.

While Michael Hodgson did not recover all his property, according to the court records victims more often than not recovered their property when they apprehended those who robbed them. The trial transcripts did not always detail whether or not the robbed reclaimed their stolen goods (out of the 125 cases I read, 69 records did not mention it at all). However, of those trials where the subject is mentioned, 37 stated that the robbers recovered their goods, while 18 never found them again.

Later in court, six men, including James White and two officers of Bow Street, all corroborated Hodgson’s story of what had happened that day. Even though Nerod called five character defense witnesses a jury found both him and Williams guilty. This case, and the other similar ones already discussed in this study, are fairly representative of most robberies at the time that came to trial. These trial records demonstrate that

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Londoners who became victims of robberies usually played a key role in apprehending their assailants.

**With a Little Help**

While London seemed in the midst of moving towards a more organized and professional police force at the end of the eighteenth century, ordinary private citizens still played a large role in the apprehension the highwaymen and footpads who robbed them.

The historian J. M. Beattie argues that the commercial and propertied classes adamantly claimed that London needed a criminal administration that could more effectively apprehend and punish robbers as well as prevent them and others from committing more crimes.¹⁵⁸ However, Lucy Moore in *The Thieves Opera* states that despite any increases in crime, Englishmen and women seemed wary of a professional, permanent police force, out of fear of it devolving into a corrupt private army. The public worried about a strong police infringing on the rights and liberties of Englishmen – birthrights that stemmed not from social status but from nationality and individual freedom.¹⁵⁹

This conflict between personal liberties and protection from crime meant that the first official Metropolitan Police force didn’t come into existence until 1829 with the passing of Robert Peel’s Metropolitan Police Act. However, institutions existed before that date which set out to combat crimes such as robbery and highway robbery. Before

¹⁵⁹ Moore, *Thieves Opera*, 177.
the Metropolitan Police, men known as “thief-takers” could be hired by victims to hunt down criminals. Thief-takers experienced their heyday in the early eighteenth century. Lucy Moore explores this period and these men, including one of the most famous thief-takers, Jonathan Wild in *The Thieves Opera*. She argues that thief takers came about because people wanted to recover their stolen goods, and the government believed it cheaper and easier to “defer responsibility” to other people willing to deal with these duties. However, their knowledge of and access to the criminal underworld allowed these thief-takers to develop networks of blackmail, informing, bribery, framing, organization of theft, and receiving and fencing stolen goods. Moore argues that the story of Jonathan Wild (who lived from 1682 until convicted and hanged in 1725 for numerous crimes, including theft) remains essential to the history of crime. She states that Fielding’s Bow Street Runners used many of the techniques Wild established as self-designated “thief-taker general.” These included interrogation methods such as separating suspects and promising pardons in order to get information or confessions. However, Wild’s criminal organization also resembled an early prototype of modern organized crime groups such as the American Mafia. With the establishment of the Bow-Street Offices in the 1730s and 1740s, and the notoriety that came from the downfall of Jonathan Wild, thief-takers did not seem as common outside the early eighteenth century, and neither the term, nor any descriptions of the position ever showed up in any of the robbery and highway robberies records in the late eighteenth century.

The official institutions established in England in order to help keep the peace comprised of constables and night watchmen. This system dated back to the thirteenth

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century; however, the growth London experienced during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries tested the limits of these more traditional methods of managing crimes like robbery. As demonstrated in the case of the robbery of John-Prade Halliday, Londoners who apprehended robbers brought them to constables. In fact, the law required these men in order to officially arrest someone and bring them before a justice of the peace. However these duties encompassed the extent of their official responsibilities and they did not generally investigate crimes nor prosecute them. During the eighteenth century watchmen and constables moved from a voluntary service, to a salaried position. This shift meant that now some of these mean walked regular “beats” and wore uniforms. They became more experienced, but unfortunately their occupation remained a very low-paid, and low-status position. Concerns began to rise over corruption and close ties to the criminals the city employed them to police.161

Henry Fielding, a novelist and jurist, and his blind half-brother John Fielding in 1749 founded the “Bow Street Runnders.” The public created the nickname the “Runners,” however, the officers themselves never used it, and considered it a derogatory term. There were only six original members, and they did not go out on patrols. Instead, these men resembled the “thief takers” that existed in an unofficial capacity and solved “petty crime” in exchange

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for a fee. The official backing and employment under the Bow Street magistrates’ office at No. 4 Bow Street separated the Runners from the earlier thief-takers who were in business for themselves. The Runners discontinued their service in 1839.  

Henry and John Fielding’s “Bow Street Runners,” emerged as an evolution of sorts of the thief-taking profession, by having men on retainer who magistrates sent out when a Londoner reported a crime. The “runners” went out to find and bring in the person suspected of having committed the crime, and established a criminal intelligence network to collect information about suspected criminals and recently committed crimes. Emsley, Hitchcock and Shoemaker state that the Fieldings’ new system set out with the goal to deter criminals by increasing the certainty that they would be detected and prosecuted. Unlike thief-takers, the Bow Street officers, magistrates, and constables frequently appeared in the Old Bailey proceedings as witnesses. They usually gave some account of

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either catching the accused highwaymen or footpads, or how the prisoners arrived before them and what the officers found when they searched their prisoners.

The constables and watchmen appeared helpful to the victims of robberies in quite a few cases tried at the Old Bailey, including the robbery of Robert Hall. Robert Hall traveled along Drury Lane at around a quarter before two in the morning on Friday the 14th of February 1790, when a gang of seven or eight footpads brutally beat and robbed him of much of his clothing, worth a total of one shilling and eight pennies.

A group of strangers came up to Robert Hall almost immediately after robbers fled the scene and took him to a watch-house. A constable named Jeremiah Hodges recalled the events he experienced that night. Hodges said that while he worked at a watch-house that night a crowd of strangers brought in a “very bloody” Hall, “very much cut and wounded.” Around an hour later, a few other watchmen brought in James Bath, who had been detained for taking part in a riot. Hall immediately got up and singled out Bath as one of the main members of the gang who robbed him.

Hugh Garrol, the watchman who detained the group of men that included Bath and brought them to the watch-house, told his story during the trial as well. He said that around half past two that morning, as he stood in his “box” in Smart’s Building in Holburn, he heard some noise coming from Little Queen Street. Garrol said a man came up to him and claimed a group of people brought a man to his watch-house “half-murdered.” Garrol then went and met with three other watchmen at the door of a building in Holburn where a crowd had gathered near where the beating and robbery took place and a crowd had gathered. The watchmen then raided the crowd and brought some of the men to the watch-house.
James Bath pleaded that he just spent the night inside drinking beer at the “Falcon and Castle”, and came outside when he heard the commotion to investigate it. Bath argued that watchmen simply tried to pin the crime on him, and he did not know anything of what happened to Hall. However, the jury found Robert Hall’s testimony more convincing, and convicted the 21-year-old James Bath.

While some of those robbed had more in common with Robert Hall, many of the victims of robberies had more in common with John-Prade Halliday or Michael Hodgson, in that they, or a nearby Londoner, assumed the main roles involved in the apprehension of the person who robbed them. Even in a case like Hall’s, where constables and watchmen featured prominently in the apprehension and the trial, ordinary Londoners, such as the complete strangers who brought him to the watch-house and alerted Garrol, still played an important role.

**Victims as Prosecutors**

Just as Michael Hodgson, John-Prade Halliday and others in this study have demonstrated, in the trials at the Old Bailey around the end of the eighteenth century, the robbed (or all those who were the victim of any crime) were many times the chief prosecutor in their own cases. Those who had been robbed received the designation of “the prosecutor” or “the prosecutrix” during the trials rather than “the victim.” The robbed seemed to be fairly apt in their role as prosecutor as approximately 57 percent of all those robbers who they brought to trial received guilty verdicts from the jury in their trials. British historians and the directors of the Old Bailey Online Project, Clive Emsley,
Robert Shoemaker, and Tim Hitchcock describe the courtroom environment stating that trials held there typically did not last very long. Prosecutors had always been allowed the use of a lawyer, but it rarely happened before the 1720s and 1730s, and it remained generally a rare occurrence until 1834 when widespread adoption of prosecuting lawyers began to take place. Defendants in felony cases, such as robbery and highway robbery, did not gain the right to use legal representation in trial until 1730, because court officials believed that it required “no manner of skill to make a plain and honest defence,” and judges would have been enough to look out for their well-being. However, as more lawyers showed up on the prosecuting side officials lifted this ban, and by the first few decades of the nineteenth century the balance of power evened out a bit in the courtroom. However, even into the early nineteenth century those lawyers who took part in cases at the Old Bailey rarely reached the pinnacle of the legal profession – in fact they often became the target for accusations of ignorance of the law or witnesses bullying. Generally the transcripts of the Old Bailey proceedings did not record the voices of the court or lawyers and instead chose to focus on the back and forth, “he-said, she-said,” type of debate between the prosecutor (the robbed) and the defendant (the robber).^{164}

Most of the records from cases of robbery and highway robbery tried at the Old Bailey during 1780 featured the victims of robbery themselves as the sole prosecutors detailing what happened during the crime. One or more witnesses usually followed the opening testimony, in order to tell the court what they knew about the robbery. Finally, the accused highwayman or footpad then gave their defense and brought in character witnesses to end the trial. In the robbery of Michael Hodgson, a small amount of legal

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counsel appeared in the record, in which the transcript of Thomas Williams and Thomas Nerod’s defense simply read “the prisoners left their defence to their Counsel.” However, the records did not describe what that defense entailed. The Hodgson case took place during the year 1800, and while many of the accused that stood trial in the year 1780 simply denied any knowledge of the crime or gave a reason why it could not have been them, cases where lawyers were used existed. Francis Lawley stood on trial at the Old Bailey on June 28th 1780 for a highway robbery he committed against Thomas Large. Large accused Lawley of violently stealing four shillings from him. After Large testified to his account of what happened, the court records mentioned that a “cross examination” took place, and the defense counsel asked Large a few questions as he attempted to poke holes in Large’s testimony. Likewise, this lawyer also cross examined the witness for the prosecution at the case. The defendant, just like Williams and Nerod, simply stated “I leave my defence to my counsel.” The minor extent to which lawyers’ voices appeared in a few cases, such as in the robbery of Thomas Large, combined with the numerous other trials in which lawyers did not show up at all, demonstrated that those who had a significant role in the crime itself (perpetrators, victims, and witnesses) remained the key actors in the trial as well.

The proceedings seemed to indicate a shift in the value placed on lawyers in the year 1800, when they began to occupy more space in the transcripts. The trial for the robbery of John Witmarsh represented this shift. John Witmarsh fell victim to a highwayman named John Franklin who, according to Whitmarsh’s testimony, stole at

165 Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 13 March 2013), October 1800, trial of THOMAS WILLIAMS THOMAS NEROD, alias WILLIAMS (t18001029-7).

166 Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 13 March 2013), June 1780, trial of FRANCIS LAWLEY (t17800628-46).
gunpoint a silver watch worth ten pounds and ten shillings, as well as two pounds, nine shillings, and six pennies in coins. In this case, as with many in the year 1800 that involved a lawyer, the lawyer is listed by name at the beginning of the transcript which read “the case opened by Mr. Knapp.” Knapp worked as the lawyer to the prosecution, and he showed up in this capacity a few times in the Old Bailey Proceedings for robberies over the course of that year. The records state that Knapp cross-examined witnesses and described in detail what questions he asked. During this particular case, he squared off against Mr. Knowlys (a lawyer who also emerged multiple times during this year), the counsel for the defense. Knowlys also asked a lot of questions, and the records prominently displayed the voices of these two lawyers in the transcript. The transcript for the case, for which John Franklin was found not guilty, is also much longer than most if not all of the trial records from the year 1780, and many of those from the year 1790.167

While there does appear to be a shift that occurred in the records during this time, as Emsley, Hitchcock, and Shoemaker state, there were still more than a few cases were lawyers were not present in the year 1800. John-Prade Halliday conducted his prosecution by himself, and Mary Oakes did not have a lawyer assist her during her defense. John-Prade Halliday, like many other who had been robbed during the late eighteenth century played a key and pro-active role not only in the apprehension of the person who robbed him, but also in the prosecution against her.

**Conclusion**

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The court records suggest that no one seemed safe from a potential encounter with highwaymen or footpads in London around the end of the eighteenth century. Women and men; children and adults; wealthy elite and servants; as well as working class and even poor Londoners, all faced this threat – it seemed only a matter of chance whether or not of someone was robbed. The fact that no one seemed safe, may have contributed to the fears of robbery in the capital, and the belief that robbery was a serious looming problem for all Londoners, even though statistically, it occurred much less frequently than other less violent forms of theft.

While the process of moving toward a more modern professionalized police force began during this time, those people who had been robbed and other normal bystanders and passing travelers played a crucial part in the arrest and prosecution of those individuals who robbed them. The power in the relationship between the robbers and the robbed that contributed to the fear Londoners experienced seemed to shift after the crime itself so that victims now went on the hunt to bring their accosters to justice. This transference of power occurred with the help of nearby fellow Londoners, and sometimes with the assistance of watchmen, constables, the Bow Street Runners, and lawyers. In the concluding chapter of this thesis I provide a short conclusion of my findings, address the place of my analysis in the historical conversation and suggest some possible areas of future research.
Conclusion

Fig. 24

Panoramic View of London, (1751) by T. Bowles. This view of London portrays the city as a bustling metropolis even in the middle of the eighteenth century. The foot-traffic and commercial interactions that took place on the streets provided ample opportunities for highwaymen and footpads. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons [public domain].
In my introduction I stated that when I started this thesis I wanted to explore what part crime played in day to day life in London in the late eighteenth century. I began by looking for a separate “criminal culture” in my study, however, the situation in London at the time was much more complicated than a simple underground-mainstream dichotomy. The further I got into my research, the more I began to explore the ways that crime intermingled with society and the black and white boundaries became greyer. I am not arguing that London culture was synonymous with criminal culture. Rather, that robbers in London at the time interacted and formed relationships with many of the same networks that Londoners who did not engage in criminal activity took part in on a day to day basis. My interest then began to focus on these grey areas and the spaces where robbers came into contact with the general public – before, during and after the crimes occurred.

In order to dissect the networks and explore the intermingling, I chose to study the crime of robbery. Robbery provides an excellent case study because robbing required no special skills making it a crime open to Londoners of many backgrounds. Robbery offers a good view of those grey areas because robbers did not discriminate; anyone might have been a victim. The public observations of robbery generated fear and shaped the interactions that took place between robbers and the general public.

Public representation of highwaymen and footpads in the press spawned a climate of fear in London. Descriptions of the violence that highwaymen and footpads employed in their course of the crimes generated this fear. Violence set them apart from other non-or less-violent thefts that occurred in much greater numbers in the capital, but received much less coverage in the public discussion of crime at the time. Victims of robbery
came from all different social classes and demographic groups, and this too contributed to the fear by creating an image of robbers who could attack anyone at any time. No one travelling the streets and highways seemed to be safe from an encounter with them.

This ardent fear appeared to have overshadowed some of the new social and economic explanations of criminals’ motives and emerging humanitarian approaches to crime prevention. Whether or not the crime ended in the death of the victim, the death penalty was consistently applied to those men and women convicted of robbery and highway robbery throughout these two decades. Despite the fervent expression of fear before and during the crime, the victims of robbery shifted the balance of power in the relationship between themselves and their attackers after the robbery. The robbed often became the key players in the apprehension and prosecution of those who robbed them, and often did so with the help of other nearby Londoners. Occasionally the new policing and legal forces of London at the time also contributed to the power seized by the victims of robberies in their fight against highwaymen and footpads.

The perceptions that Londoners not engaged in criminal activity held of robbery were rooted in the legal definitions of the crime and appeared often in newspapers and other writings. In these publications, writers presented robbery as a serious plague that threatened their great capital, and endangered their businesses, leisure, property, as well as personal safety. These perceptions portrayed highwaymen and footpads as violent young males who operated in well organized gangs.

The court records suggest that highwaymen and footpads were often young men who operated in organized gangs and used violence to create fear and ensure success in their attack – and this paralleled the public perceptions. However, the trials show that
women did in fact account for a small – but noticeable – percentage of robbers, and robbers also acted individually as well as in groups. The court proceedings also demonstrated that highwaymen and footpads created networks with prostitutes, alehouses, pawnshops, and workhouses in order find potential victims, recruit new robbers, peddle pilfered goods, and increase the odds of successfully accomplishing their crime and escaping.

Many of the perceptions of the causes of robbery centered on the idea of “idleness.” This term meant more than simply unemployment to those using it to describe criminals. They often connected it to the pursuit of vices, and it embodied the antithesis of the industrious hard working Londoner. During the early days of the industrial revolution, London culture placed a high value on the virtues of honest work and commerce, robbery constituted an attack on both fronts. Contemporary witnesses identified “idleness” as a defining criminal characteristic and drew a moral distinction as opposed to a demographic one. In addition to this, public houses and imprisonment for petty crimes drew suspicion from the public as likely breeding grounds for new footpads and highwaymen. Robberies occurred more frequently in certain areas of London; not because a certain class of people lived there, but because certain kinds of activities transacted there. Money changed hands in these areas in places such as taverns, brothels and markets – places where idleness took up its abode. Idleness, like crime, tended to be an affair of the young; older married men and women with families had fewer opportunities to indulge in it.

In addition to the commercial hubs where higher concentrations of robberies occurred, other networks also played a crucial role in the experiences of robbers and their
victims. “Gangs,” like idleness, commonly appeared in the public image of highwaymen and footpads. A complex symmetry existed between these gangs of robbers and the groups of thief-chasers who pursued them: loosely-based, temporary cooperatives that took action based on a common self-interest. The use of character witnesses during trial also tied into the importance of association and connections as well as the view of criminality as more of an ethical matter rather than class based. Witnesses testifying at trial may have belonged to the demographic profile and social status as the accuser and the accused, which did not conform to a notion of a “criminal class.” These associative ties that existed among robbers, and victims, in eighteenth century London depended more on “social commerce” than “social classes.”

Histories of gender or race cannot focus on just one gender or race, and recognize that race and gender are socially constructed relationships of power. In similar fashion, my research demonstrates that historians studying crime need to look beyond just the criminals to the ways the victims helped to define the crime and criminal and shape the outcomes. In order to fully explore the histories of crime, it is important to study the criminals, their victims, and the relationships and networks that connected them to other people around them not engaged in criminal activity. In my thesis I have done just this, by looking not only the robbers, but also the robbed, as well as the ways that the general public viewed robbery at the time.

My research contributes not only to the historical discussion surrounding crime, but also to the histories of life in London at the end of the eighteenth century. According to my sources, robbery had a significant impact on the mindset of many Londoners at the time. At a time when, according to historians like Beattie and Foucault, attitudes and
policy began to shift away from violent punishments, the fear of robbery was powerful enough to counter this trend. The application of death penalties for highwaymen and footpads remained consistent over these two decades. The use of the death penalty against convicted robbers exemplifies the shift in power that occurred after the robbery when victims went on the hunt for those who attacked them.

While I was fortunate to have access to extensive online databases for researching crime in London, I did not do research in the physical archives of London. Consequently, this thesis has raised a few questions that I would like to address in the future. One of the first questions is the issue of race and the relationship between crime and ethnic communities in London. References to race and immigrant communities rarely appeared in the robbery cases read for this study. However, this was a time when many people immigrated to London looking for jobs or created during the industrial revolution in the metropole of a growing empire. This influx brought a large number of different races and immigrant communities into contact with each other on the streets of London. Did robbery, or crime in general, differ in these communities or between races than the way it occurred in the trials I have read? Did public perceptions or experiences in the court differ in their treatment or relationships to crime in these communities or races?

Another area for further potential research is the specific attitudes toward women in robbery and other crimes. In the cases I read women appeared to be treated no differently in the courtroom environment at the time; gender historians suggest this similarity is unlikely. This is an issue that deserves more research. How would eighteenth century Londoners describe female criminals differently from male criminals, or did the criminal allegiances supersede their gender attributes? Were there subtle
differences in the way the court and newspapers represented female robbers, and other female criminals, in London at the time? How did the ways they described female criminals differ from the ways they presented female victims or women not engaged in criminal activity?

Finally, this study could be extended to all thefts in London at the end of the eighteenth century. Theft was the most numerous crime heard at the Old Bailey at this time. A study of all thefts could provide greater insights into the culture and networks of London. In addition to these insights, a study of all thefts could draw distinctions between the perceptions Londoners had of violent robbers and other thieves, such as pickpockets or burglars.

These are just three main ways that the history of robbery in London at the end of the eighteenth century could benefit from further research. In this thesis I analyze both the perceptions and lived experiences of robbery in London from 1780 to 1800. My analysis depicts a complicated relationship in which the experiences of robbers in their quest for fortune formed perceptions which generated a fear that, in turn, helped to shape the policies meant to address the issue of robbery.
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Secondary

**English Economic and Social History**


Histories of Crime


London Everyday Life


Policing, Punishment and Law


Methodology


