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Why do some modern societies punish their offenders differently to others? Why are some more punitive and others more tolerant in their approach to offending and how can these differences be explained? Based on extensive historical analysis and fieldwork in the penal systems of England, Australia and New Zealand on the one hand and Finland, Norway and Sweden on the other, this book seeks to answer these questions.

The book argues that the penal differences that currently exist between these two clusters of societies emanate from their early nineteenth-century social arrangements, when the Anglophone societies were dominated by exclusionary value systems that contrasted with the more inclusionary values of the Nordic countries. The development of their penal programmes over this two hundred year period, including the much earlier demise of the death penalty in the Nordic countries and significant differences between the respective prison rates and prison conditions of the two clusters, reflects the continuing influence of these values. Indeed, in the early 21st century these differences have become even more pronounced.

John Pratt and Anna Eriksson offer a unique contribution to this topic of growing importance: comparative research in the history and sociology of punishment. This book will be of interest to those studying criminology, sociology, punishment, prison and penal policy, as well as professionals working in prisons or in the area of penal policy across the six societies that feature in the book.