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**The Mystery of a Hansom Cab:  
Migration, Crime, and Legal Institutions  
in Colonial Australia**  
Chetan

**Abstract**

On January 12, 1788, eleven ships under the command of Captain Arthur Philip anchored at Sydney Cove where he deported nearly 700 convicts and 200 mariners. These facts substantiate the contribution of criminals in forming the multi-ethnic Australian culture but they also reflect upon Britain's social cleansing exercise to decriminalise the homeland. Fergus Hume uses Australia's colonial history as background to discuss the complicated relationship between migration and crime in his novel *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*. On the one hand, he acknowledges the contribution of convicts and government sponsored migration (after 1832) in Australia's economic progress and on the other hand, he expresses concern for the deteriorating law and order situation with migrants caught for illegal activities like drinking, stealing and homicide. The paper inquires into the way in which Hume projects the establishment of law enforcement agencies in Australia for curbing the criminal activities of the immigrants. He also encapsulates the role of print media in capturing the threat emanating from migrants to the demography and infrastructure of Melbourne with the spreading of slums.

**Keywords:** Migration, Crime, Colonial Australia, Detective Fiction, Law, Media, Murder

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In the recent decades, there has been a steep augmentation in studies related to the problems emanating from migration. Immigrants shoulder the blame of many social problems like being accused of stealing jobs of natives; draining the country's resources and most importantly, they are blamed for criminal activities in the host country. There are ample reasons to believe that the influx of migrants affects demographic, economic and social structures. Martinez Ramiro and Matthew T. Lee argue that the contingency between migration and crime lacks concrete evidences "historically, public opinion about immigration, and the immigrant-crime link especially, has been formed by stereotype more often than reliable data." (Ramiro and Lee 487) The quote indicates the necessity to inquire into the legitimacy of the claim that immigration escalates crime rate in the host country. It is a repudiation of stereotypical conception that the migrants, irrespective of their race and ethnicity, create problems of law and order.

In an attempt to find the reasons for the popular perception that immigration increases the crime rate, Charis E. Kubrin gives two arguments; first – that the crime rate spirals with the arrival of young migrants; second – the migrants alter the economic structure with respect to the labor market. Michael Tonry believes that "immigration and crime patterns are straightforward. First-generation economic immigrants are self-selected risk takers who leave their homes and families to move to a new country to improve their and their children's lives" (Bucarius and Tonry 2) However, their descendents are caught between the two worlds. They are in conflict with their parents on their roots. Consequently, they are involved in crime as offenders, prisoners, suspects and convicts.

The above quoted literature elucidates that migration and crime are primarily two separate domains. This literature also

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