

# **Desistance as a Social Movement\***

**Shadd Maruna†**

**Summary:** Desistance from crime has been a considerable success story for academic criminology. The concept has deep roots, but did not emerge as a mainstream focus of study for the field until the 1990s movement towards developmental or life-course criminology. From these origins, however, the term has taken on a life of its own, influencing policy and practice in criminal justice. This paper will briefly review this history, then explore what might be next for desistance research among numerous possible futures. I argue that the most fruitful approach would be to begin to frame and understand desistance not just as an individual process or journey, but rather as a social movement, like the Civil Rights movement or the ‘recovery movements’ among individuals overcoming addiction or mental health challenges. This new lens better highlights the structural obstacles inherent in the desistance process and the macro-social changes necessary to successfully create a ‘desistance-informed’ future.

**Keywords:** Desistance, social movement theory, mass incarceration, stigma.