

## Book Review

### Introduction to Convict Criminology. By Jeffrey Ian Ross (Bristol University Press, 2024, 222 pp. £27.99 pbk)

*Introduction to Convict Criminology* by Jeffrey Ian Ross provides a comprehensive examination of Convict Criminology, a subfield within criminology aiming to integrate the experiences of former prisoners into academic discourse. This book serves as an introduction and an opportunity to critically engage with a field that challenges traditional criminology's detached perspective. Ross reviews the origins, evolution and future directions of convict criminology, offering a deep understanding of its significance in criminology, corrections and social justice. The first chapter sets the stage for the book and establishes the context for why convict criminology emerged as a necessary counterpart to traditional criminology. Ross explains how traditional criminology has historically marginalized the voices of those directly affected by the criminal justice system, treating them as mere subjects of study rather than as active participants with valuable insights. This chapter lays the foundation by arguing for the legitimacy of convict criminology within academia, positioning it as a field that seeks to understand crime and justice from a theoretical standpoint and the lived realities of those who have been incarcerated. Ross effectively argues that the traditional criminological approach, while valuable, is incomplete without the inclusion of perspectives from those who have experienced the criminal justice system firsthand. This critique is central to understanding the transformative potential of convict criminology.

The introduction sets a critical tone for the book, framing convict criminology as a necessary and overdue corrective to the biases inherent in conventional criminological research. The global expansion of convict criminology is one of the significant aspects of the book. Ross dedicates some attention to detailing how scholars like Andreas Aresti and Sacha Darke have played crucial roles in bringing convict criminology to the international stage, particularly in the United Kingdom. This expansion is not merely geographical but also ideological, as convict criminology adapts to different cultural and legal contexts while maintaining its core commitment to amplifying marginalized voices. Ross discusses how the internationalization of convict criminology has allowed for a more diverse range of perspectives to be included in the field. For instance, the adaptation of convict criminology in the United Kingdom has brought attention to issues of class and race that are particularly salient in the British context. This global expansion also highlights the adaptability of convict criminology as a framework for understanding and addressing the injustices of the criminal justice system in various cultural settings. However, the book could delve deeper into the challenges faced during this expansion. For instance, how do different legal systems and cultural attitudes towards crime and punishment affect the reception of convict criminology in different countries? Ross touches on these issues, but a more detailed analysis would provide a richer understanding of the global dynamics at play.

Another important section of the book is Ross's discussion of the misconceptions surrounding convict criminology. There is a tendency to view convict criminology as a field dominated by well-educated, white, male ex-convicts who use it as a platform to air grievances about the prison system. Ross dismantles this misconception by showcasing the diversity within the field, emphasizing that convict criminology is increasingly inclusive of voices that have historically been marginalized, including women, ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ individuals. Ross highlights that the inclusion of these diverse voices is not just an ethical imperative, but also enriches the field by providing a more comprehensive understanding of the criminal justice system's impact on different communities. He discusses specific contributions from scholars and activists who bring these perspectives to the forefront, thereby challenging the notion that convict criminology is a monolithic field. This section underscores the importance of diversity in academic discourse and the role convict criminology plays in broadening the scope of criminological inquiry. The book's exploration of methodology in convict criminology is both a strength and an area that could benefit from further critical analysis. Ross advocates for a broad methodological approach that embraces qualitative research, narrative inquiry and participatory action research. This diversity in methodology is one of the field's defining characteristics, allowing for a more nuanced and humanized understanding of the criminal justice system.

However, this broad methodological approach also presents challenges, which Ross acknowledges but could explore in greater depth. For example, the personal experiences of researchers who are also former prisoners can lead to potential biases in their work. While these biases do not necessarily undermine the validity of the research, they do require careful consideration and reflexivity. A more thorough critique of these methodological challenges would enhance the book's discussion on the complexities of conducting research within convict criminology. Additionally, Ross could expand on the ethical implications of participatory research in convict criminology. Engaging current and former prisoners in research raises important questions about power dynamics, consent and the potential risks involved. These ethical considerations are crucial for understanding the full scope of convict criminology's methodological approach and its implications for the field.

The concluding chapter of *Introduction to Convict Criminology* serves as a powerful synthesis of the book's main themes and arguments. Ross effectively ties together the historical context, methodological considerations and global expansion of convict criminology, reiterating the importance of including marginalized voices in criminological research. This chapter also provides a forward-looking perspective, discussing the future directions of convict criminology and the potential challenges the field may face as it continues to evolve. Ross emphasizes the need for ongoing inclusivity and diversity within convict criminology, particularly as the field grows and gains more recognition within academia. He also touches on the potential impact of recent criminal justice reforms on convict criminology, suggesting that these changes could provide new opportunities for the field to influence policy and practice. However, the conclusion could benefit from a more in-depth discussion of the specific strategies that convict criminology scholars and activists can use to ensure that the field remains inclusive and impactful. For example, how can convict criminology practitioners engage more effectively with policymakers, media and the public to promote social justice and reform? Addressing these questions would provide readers with a clearer sense of the practical implications of convict criminology and its potential for driving change.

The appendix in *Introduction to Convict Criminology* is an important resource for readers and researchers interested in delving deeper into the historical development of convict criminology. This section of the book meticulously outlines the history of convict criminology in a chronological format, providing a clear and organized timeline of key events, milestones and influential figures that have shaped the field over the years. This chronological arrangement is valuable

for several reasons. Firstly, it allows readers to contextualize the evolution of convict criminology within the broader landscape of criminology and criminal justice reform. By presenting the history in a linear fashion, the appendix enables readers to see how convict criminology has responded to and influenced changes in the criminal justice system, as well as how it has grown from a niche subfield to a more recognized and influential movement.

Overall, *Introduction to Convict Criminology* is a must-read for anyone interested in the intersection of criminology, social justice and the experiences of those within the criminal justice system. Ross's clear and accessible writing, along with his thorough analysis and critical insights, make this book a valuable addition to the literature on criminology and corrections. While the book is comprehensive and well-structured, there are some areas where it could benefit from further exploration and critique. A deeper analysis of the challenges associated with convict criminology's broad methodological approach, as well as a more detailed discussion of the future directions of the field, would enhance its impact. Nonetheless, Ross's work is a significant contribution to the field, offering readers a thought-provoking and nuanced understanding of convict criminology and its potential to drive meaningful change.

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