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The First Dime

A Decade of Convict Criminology

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This article discusses the historical origins of Convict Criminology (CC); intellectual legacy of CC; organization of the CC group; allies in the CC struggle; recent activities of the CC group; impact of CC on the study of jails, prisons, and community corrections; and the authors' future plans. Thus, the focus of this article is on taking stock of the development of CC and identifying the accomplishments to date.

Keywords: *Convict Criminology; critical criminology; prisons; corrections*

Introduction

From the beginning of modern civilization there has been a concern for identifying and controlling those who deviate from the norms of the community. Throughout history, various strategies of social control for those designated as deviant have included banishment, slavery, transportation, corporal punishment, imprisonment, and death. For the most part, the punishments were harsh and served to separate those convicted of a myriad offenses from the rest of society.

In many ways, the scientific study of crime and corrections has not progressed very far, remaining seemingly stuck in the 19th century,

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indirectly debating the ideas of Bentham (1789/1961), Beccaria (1764/1963), and Lombroso and Ferrero (1895). Despite many efforts to provide protections for the accused and despite remedial responses as opposed to punitive sanctions, the United States stands alone in comparison with other Western industrialized societies in its use of imprisonment for those convicted of crimes. As we enter the 21st century, there are nearly 2.3 million adults behind bars in jails or prisons, 4.16 million on probation, and 784,408 on parole (Glaze & Bonczar, 2007; Paige & Beck, 2006). The majority of these men and women are poor Whites, Blacks, and Latinos. During the past 150 years, slaves have won emancipation, women have gained the right to vote and some measure of gender equality, minorities have won their civil rights, and gays and lesbians are increasingly winning legal protection. Conversely, it appears that people with criminal convictions are subject to increasing legal and social prejudice, exclusion, and marginalization, including the loss of voting privileges in many states (Murphy, Newmark, & Philip, 2006).

Naturally, several analyses and critiques of this state of affairs have been produced. One of the more recent is *Convict Criminology* (CC). CC is a relatively new and controversial perspective in the practitioner field of corrections and the academic field of criminology. It challenges the way in which crime and correctional problems are traditionally represented and discussed by researchers, policy makers, and politicians. In part, CC emerged as a result of the frustration ex-convict academics experienced with the extant understanding of crime and its control. Convict Criminologists are especially concerned with how the problem of crime is defined; the solutions that are proposed; the devastating impacts of those decisions on the men and women "labeled" criminals who are locked in correctional facilities, separated from loved ones, and prevented from fully reintegrating into the community; record high rates of incarceration, overcrowding of penal institutions, and a lack of meaningful programming inside and outside the prison; and the structural impediments to successful reentry that results in a revolving-door criminal justice system (Maruna & Immarigeon, 2004; Richards, 2003; Richards & Jones, 1997, 2004).

As defined (see Richards & Ross, 2001, p. 180; Ross & Richards, 2003, p. 6), CC represents the work of convicts or ex-convicts who are in possession of a PhD or on their way to completing one, or enlightened academics and practitioners who contribute to a new conversation about crime and corrections. This is a "new criminology," led by former prisoners who are now among the ranks of academic faculty. The CC group tends to conduct research that illustrates the experiences of prisoners and ex-cons;

attempts to combat the misrepresentations of scholars, the media, and government; and proposes new and less costly strategies that are more humane and effective (Richards & Ross, 2003a, 2003b). The convict scholars are able to do what many previous researchers could not: merge their past with their present and provide a provocative approach to the academic study of their field. The convict perspective is also based on perceptions, experiences, and analytical ideas that originate with defendants and prisoners, which are then developed by critical scholars (Richards & Ross, 2003a, 2003b).

It is now 8 years since Richards and Ross published their essay "The New School of Convict Criminology" in *Social Justice* (2001) and 6 years since they published their coedited book *Convict Criminology* (2003). The CC group has been working together to conduct research, present papers at academic conferences, publish their findings in scholarly venues, mentor ex-convicts, and share their real-life experiences in custody and the academy with prison reform groups, criminal justice professionals, and the public at large. Although this group has made significant strides in the field in just a few short years, there is much more work left to be accomplished.

In short, unless we approach matters in a more strategic fashion, the idea of CC may simply be a cursory footnote in the history of criminology and criminal justice. Thus, the focus of this article is to describe the development of CC and to identify the accomplishments to date. It is now appropriate to ask, "What has this new school of CC accomplished in the last 10 years?"

The Historical and Official Origins of Convict Criminology

Over the years, numerous ex-cons have worked at universities in many different disciplines. Most of them "stayed in the closet" because they were afraid of the reactions of their colleagues, university administrators, and the community as a whole. They most likely even feared for their jobs. One exception was Frank Tannenbaum, sometimes referred to as the "grandfather of labeling theory," a "wobbly," organizer, political activist, former federal prisoner, professor at Columbia University in the 1930s, and one of the first to openly identify himself as an ex-convict. Tannenbaum served 1 year in prison and then moved on to forge a prolific career as a journalist and scholar.

Intellectually, the modern-day origins of CC, however, began with the published work of John Irwin—particularly with his books *The Felon*

(1970), *Prisons in Turmoil* (1980), and *The Jail* (1985). Irwin served 5 years in prison for armed robbery in the 1950s (Ross & Richards, 2003, p. xx). In the late 1960s, he was a student of David Matza and Erving Goffman when he completed his PhD at the University of California, Berkeley. Yet even as he became a prominent prison ethnographer and many of his colleagues learned of his background, his ex-convict history was only apparent to those who read his texts closely. Nevertheless, Irwin was technically out of the closet, doing inside-prison research, but still stood nearly alone in his representation of the convict perspective.

On the heels of Irwin's work was that of Richard McCleary (1978/1992), who wrote *Dangerous Men*. This book came out of McCleary's experience and doctoral research conducted once he was out on parole in the state of Minnesota. He has gone on to a well-respected career as a criminologist at the University of California, Irvine.

In 1988, Robert Gaucher, Howard Davidson, and Liz Elliot started *The Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*, an academic journal specializing in publishing the work of convicts and ex-convicts. As Canadian criminologists, they were disappointed with presentations at the 1987 International Conference on Penal Abolition III, held in Montréal, where participants were concerned with the lack of prisoner representation. The conference participants were prison-reform activists and abolitionists who would later found *The Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* and then invent the concept of "peacemaking criminology" (see MacLean & Pepinsky, 1993; Pepinsky & Quinney, 1991). To date, this journal has published more than 20 issues featuring convict authors and others who are critical of the prison system, including CC professors.

Nevertheless, through the 1980s, there were still too few ex-convict professors to establish a research agenda or theoretical perspective based exclusively on convict research and literature. Although the prison population was growing in the 1970s and 1980s, there were still only a handful of ex-convicts completing their PhDs in Sociology, Criminology, Criminal Justice, and related disciplines. This would change when the "war on drugs" (1980 to the present) dramatically increased the number of middle-class prisoners, some of whom would later exit prison, complete advanced college degrees, and become academics. By the 1990s, there were a significant number of ex-convict graduate students and professors using their prior experience in the criminal justice system to study jails and prisons.

The CC group was finally organized at American Society of Criminology (ASC) annual meetings. In 1997, Chuck Terry (then a PhD student) was

complaining to Joan Petersilia (his professor at UC-Irvine) about “the failure of criminologists to recognize the dehumanizing conditions of the criminal justice system and the lives of those defined as criminal” (Ross & Richards, 2003, pp. xvii-xxii). Petersilia suggested that Terry put together a session on this topic for the 1997 ASC conference. Terry invited ex-convict professors John Irwin, Stephen C. Richards, Edward Tromanhouser, and PhD student Alan Mobley to participate in a session titled “Convicts Critique Criminology: The Last Seminar.” This was the first time a number of ex-convict academics appeared openly on the same panel at a national criminology conference.

The session drew a large audience that included the national media. That evening, Jim Austin, Irwin, Richards, and Terry discussed the importance and possibilities of ex-convict professors working together to conduct “inside studies” of prisons. In the spring of 1998, Richards spoke with Jeffrey Ian Ross about the possibility of editing a book using manuscripts produced by ex-con academics. Almost immediately, Ross and Richards sent out formal invitations to ex-convict professors and graduate students, and to well-known critical authors of work on jails and prisons. They invited authors to contribute original autobiographical chapters to the proposed volume. There were a few invitees who declined these invitations for personal or professional reasons. Clearly, this would be a controversial undertaking. Nevertheless, in short order, a proposal was written that would eventually result in the book *Convict Criminology*.

At the 1998 ASC meeting, Richards, Terry, and another ex-con professor, Rick Jones, appeared on a panel honoring Richard Quinney. Meanwhile, the group used the conference as an opportunity to find and recruit additional ex-convict professors and graduate students; Greg Newbold and Dan Murphy, respectively, joined the informal discussion.

At the 1999 ASC meeting in Toronto, Richards organized the first sessions focused on CC. The two sessions, “Convict Criminology: An Introduction to the Movement, Theory, and Research—Part I and Part II,” featured ex-convict professors Richards, Irwin, Tromanhouser, and Newbold; ex-convict graduate students Terry, Murphy, Warren Gregory, Susan Dearing, and Nick Mitchell; and “non-con” colleagues Ross, Bruce Arrigo, Bud Brown, Mike Brooks, Preston Elrod, Marianne Fisher-Giorlando, Barbara Owen, and Randy Shelden. A number of the papers presented in these two sessions were early versions of chapters that would later be published in *Convict Criminology* (Ross & Richards, 2003).

In 2001, Ross and Richards published the article “The New School of Convict Criminology” in the journal *Social Justice*; they discussed the birth

and definition of CC and outlined the parameters of the movement and the research perspective. In 2003, they published the edited book *Convict Criminology*, which included chapters written by the founders of the group. The book included a foreword by Todd Clear, a preface by Irwin, eight autobiographical chapters by ex-Convict Criminologists, and a number of supporting chapters by “non-con” colleagues who wrote about jail and prison issues. This was the first time ex-convict academics appeared in a book together discussing their own criminal convictions, their time in prison, and their experiences in graduate school and as professors at universities. Meanwhile, the group added a number of new ex-convict members, including Tracy Andrus, Dave Curry, Richard Hogan, and Von Nebbit.

The Intellectual Legacy of Convict Criminology

CC builds off of two different scholarly traditions: critical criminology and qualitative/ethnographic methods. First, the work of Richard Quinney—in particular, his *Social Reality of Crime*, in which he challenges the very foundation of public policy that focuses on the behavior of the poor—is most relevant to the concept of CC. This book represents a sharp departure from behavioral and middle-range theories that place the cause of deviance and criminality on the individual or on his or her specific social support groups. Critical criminology does not ignore the micro level, whether it involves deviant motivation, deviant adaptations, or subcultural involvements. Rather, it conceptualizes the micro level in a wholly different way from these other motivation-oriented theories. Like Quinney, CC conceptualizes these micro activities as being embedded in the larger political economy and as a reflection of it.

CC also challenges commonly held beliefs; thus, it is coterminous with many of the epistemological approaches found in critical criminology, which tries to deconstruct myths and look for deeper meanings. For example, many people, including some criminologists, hold firm assumptions or judgments concerning the moral character or behavior of persons convicted of crimes. Convict Criminologists, at the very least, challenge the idea that a person’s personality traits, level of self-esteem, or moral character can be determined by referral to the fact that they have been convicted of a crime or spent time in prison.

Second, CC emphasizes a qualitative/ethnographic methodology. In the foreword to Terry’s *The Fellas: Overcoming Prison and Addiction* (2003), Irwin notes that

Terry and the rest of the ex-Convict Criminologists (of whom I am one), are able to get at this type of phenomena—that is, the social worlds of criminals and prisoners—better than almost anyone else. It starts with our ability to “speak the language,” and then to pull close to our research subjects and enter into their meaning worlds. (p. viii)

Many criminologists have questioned their discipline’s reliance on quantitative methods as a means of understanding the problem of crime. Tewksbury (1995), for example, has encouraged criminologists to use a variety of methods, and Marquardt (1986) has expressed the value of ethnography “as penetrating the backstage prison behavior systems.” Fleisher (1989) has noted that quantitative research often focuses more on administrative concerns such as overcrowding, gang violence, recidivism, and so on.

Irwin (1987, p. 42) is a bit more forceful in his advocacy of qualitative methods. He maintains that the qualitative approach is essential in achieving a full understanding of human behavior. “Any approach not based firmly on qualitative or phenomenological ground is not only a distortion of the phenomenon but also is very likely a corruption,” he wrote. Distortion occurs because the meanings and categories we use are inaccurate. Irwin’s own qualitative research indicated that drastic changes (i.e., racial conflict, gangs, the warehousing of prisoners) had taken place, and the tests of the deprivation and importation models during the 1970s were already irrelevant by the late 1960s. He goes on to say that the distortions are not random and are often used to maintain the status quo—which is corruption.

Similarly, Gilinan and Domahidy (1995; see also Katz, 1988) state that a wealth of interpretative research in criminal justice underscores the importance of beliefs, values, and nonrational elements in organizational life but that we seem to proceed as if such factors do not exist or have little effect. We design and deploy research protocols that assume that people behave rationally as defined by some shared cultural norm. This ignores the fact that individuals may be motivated by emotion, or oppositional or subcultural norms, are suffering from a severe psychological disorder, are young and not that smart, or are too high or drunk to care. The problem is that most quantitative research (e.g., regression or factor analysis) assumes that people respond to external stimuli in a predictable (rational) way, as a physical scientist might expect when plotting a chemical reaction or trajectory of a planet on a graph or scale. Unfortunately, social science errs when it uses the tools of the physical sciences and forgets that humans wander in their decision calculus.

Typically, researchers and writers proceed as if they are somehow magically objective, without considering how their own gender, racial, ethnic, national, or social class point of view or life experiences might

influence the way they conceptualize research questions. They assume that because they write in the third person or from an “outside” perspective or because they use quantitative figures, there is no interaction effect, and their own beliefs and values are automatically neutral or controlled. This delusion is especially dangerous when free-world, middle-class academics are writing about phenomena they have never personally experienced—for example, issues related to disadvantaged groups confined in prison. These scholars are deluded into thinking they understand prison reality. The delusion or misunderstanding leads to a distorted view of prisons and prisoners, based on the judgmental ideas of the sheltered middle-class academic hired by or serving government taskmasters. Remember, most academics have a low opinion of criminals, and their prison research is sponsored by federal or state contracts and grants. As these circumspect reports accumulate in research literature, science is corrupted to serve the status quo.

The solution begins with these researchers at least declaring their bias. How do they personally feel about drug addicts, thieves, and murderers? Have they ever broken the law, been arrested, convicted, and served time in jail or prison? The idea is to begin thinking about how social class privilege may distort our view of social class disadvantage. Then, we might be able to better conceptualize how our personal belief systems influence the nature of our work, the theories we devise, the strategies for testing these theories, and the policies that are derived from this research.

In short, though Convict Criminologists are trained as social scientists, they do not pretend to be “objective.” Admitting their subjectivity, they use their prior experience and critical eye to better inform and focus their ethnographic methodological approach. They are especially interested in conducting face-to-face, open-ended interviews, where prisoners can tell their own stories in their own voice. Their research is then used to critique current theory, policy, and practices, promoting policy changes to help prisoners.

The fact that the reader knows that the ex-convict author was once a prisoner and that he or she actually experienced prison raises questions: Can the author be objective? Does the author know too much already to pretend? This issue, in fact, was raised by well-respected criminologist Francis Cullen during an interview with a *New York Times* reporter about his perception of CC:

[Convict criminologists] may selectively perceive their (prison) environment, paying attention to the things that jump-out at them but ignoring other factors, and therefore there’s a risk of their perceptions being unintentionally biased (St. John, 2003).

Cullen's point is well taken. Nevertheless, the Convict Criminologist researchers might argue that all researchers are biased and that their social distance from prison subjects does not improve their perception or ensure their value neutrality. They all limit the scope (depth and breadth) of their studies; they look at a small piece and measure a few variables. Unfortunately, traditional research studies tend to abstractly operationalize social structural and psychological variables. And they never control for the middle-class value systems they carry in their minds that reflect the way they see the different worlds they seek to better understand. In contrast, at least the ex-convict academics might have considerable insight into the personality traits and relative self-esteem of felons and prisoners because they have easier access to this population and a decent understanding of their social worlds.

Theoretically, CC is also rooted in Goffman's (1959, 1962, 1963) study of total institutions and stigma. Except, with ex-convict professors, the theoretical explanation becomes somewhat more complicated, even compromised, as the theorists themselves are institutional products that directly suffer stigma. Symbolically, the ex-convict academic represents two antagonistic master statuses: the convict and the professor. The former role informs the latter role but cannot be forgotten, especially when the subject of the research is prison (see Cohen, 1992, pp. 297-310). Mobley termed this the "two-legged data dilemma" (Mobley, 2003, pp. 209-225), where the ex-convict professor is a walking, talking, analytical contradiction.

The Organization of the Convict Criminology Group

The CC group is informally organized as a researching, writing, and activist collective. There is no formal membership or assignment of leadership roles; individuals voluntarily decide to associate with the group. Different members of the group lead or take responsibility for assorted functions such as serving as the lead author on a conference paper, academic article, research proposal, or program assessment; mentoring students or junior faculty; or working with the media. Ideally, the lead person invites one or more CC colleagues to share the work and, through this process, attempts to generalize the discussion and socialize the membership into the norms of academia. The group continues to grow as more prisoners exit prison to attend universities, hear about the group, and decide to contribute to activities. Typically, new members resolve to "come out" when they are introduced to the academic community at ASC or Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences conferences.

Since 1997, the group has grown as ex-convict graduate students join, receive support, complete degrees, and become professors. Slowly, the group has become stronger as ex-convicts have received jobs at academic institutions and risen through the ranks to get tenure, gain administrative experience, attract external funding, and complete significant research projects. At the very least, the past decade has proved that ex-convicts can be good academic citizens and make significant contributions to the academic literature while maintaining their original focus on prison reform. Still, this success brings complexity and contradiction.

For example, looking back to 1997, most, not all, members of the original founding ex-convict cohort were persons who had been convicted of drug offenses. This fact (see the list of contributors in Ross & Richards, 2003) may have been instrumental in encouraging “non-con” support and participation in CC activities. Other criminologists may be more likely to support the group because they remember their own experiments with illegal substances. They might even recognize how their own flirtations with drugs may or could have led to a prison sentence.

The group does not exclude or discriminate by criminal offense. The general premise is that when a person completes his sentence, he or she has paid for his crime. Nevertheless, the complexity begins because the public and many academics have a difficult time understanding and forgiving people convicted of violent or sexual offenses. Without our intention, this has led to some subtle differences in the way different ex-convict members perceive and associate with the group. In large part, this difference is driven by the reception individuals receive when they go public.

Today, criminal court records are public; these include convictions and details of crimes. CC is based on group affiliation determined by transparency and honest disclosure. The contradiction is that this is much easier for some offenses (i.e., persons convicted of drug offenses) than others (persons convicted of violent or sex offenses). The result is that the first group is more likely to be forthcoming and comfortable with employers and the mass media. Members of this group are less likely to conceal their past, shy away from media attention, or be intimidated by questions about their former criminal career. Unfortunately, the second group has more difficulty and requires more courage to comply with the need to accept transparency.

The result of this complexity and contradiction is that criminal records have become, to some degree, determinates of how, when, and where some people might decide to associate with the group. The CC group comprises active members who are “out of the closet” as well as inactive ex-con students and professors who prefer to conceal their criminal background.

The stigma associated with a felony record is sufficient to keep some members silent about their backgrounds. A few individuals may not wish to associate with any group that draws attention to their felony history. Others may simply be less inclined to join a group when they are busy with obligations to family and employment. Nevertheless, they may still participate on occasion or ask for help when necessary.

The group is not limited to students and faculty who research or teach in the areas of criminology, criminal justice, sociology, and social work. CC may also include ex-cons or “non-cons” who work outside of academia, including government agencies, private foundations, or community groups. For example, the group includes a number of ex-convicts with PhDs who are employed by government or private agencies that research or administer criminal justice programs. Although these members may not hold positions at universities, they may teach part time, write research reports that contribute to academic discourse or criminal justice policy, and participate on CC panels at professional conferences.

Finally, there is a growing group of men and women behind bars who hold advanced degrees and publish academic work about crime and corrections (i.e., Carceral, 2004, 2006; Hassine, 2004; Paluch, 2004; Rideau & Wikberg, 1992). Some of these authors are better published than many professors. A number of them have coauthored books and academic articles with free-world academics. At the present time, the CC group includes male and female ex-con academics from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Finland. The United States, which offers the largest prison population in the world, continues to contribute the most members.

What We Have Accomplished So Far

The group has now been at work for more than 10 years. The primary contributions of the group are centered on four complementary areas: research, mentorship, programming, and advocacy. The primary goal is to identify problems in the criminal justice system and develop realistic solutions to those concerns.

Research

The CC group has conducted research on conditions of confinement, the prison experience, personal transformation, problems related to legal

discrimination and social stigma, the reduction of the prison population, and the provision of assistance to prisoners exiting prison to reenter free society (reentry). Our work on conditions of confinement, prison experience, personal transformation, addiction, and the problems of reentry has resulted in numerous books (see Curry, 1985; Curry & Decker, 2002; Dennehy & Newbold, 2001; Irwin, 1970, 1980, 1985, 2005; Irwin & Austin, 1994; Jones & Schmid, 2000; Newbold 1982, 1989, 1992, 2000, 2007; Ross & Richards, 2002, 2003; Terry, 2003) and dozens of published articles and book chapters. The focus has been on how men and women experience and cope with the difficulties associated with being processed through the criminal justice system, their survival, and lessons learned.

We have also worked on funded research projects designed to evaluate programs related to reducing the prison population and providing assistance to people exiting prison and reentering free society (i.e., Austin, Richards, & Jones, 2003a, 2003b; Richards, Austin, & Jones, 2004a, 2004b). The result of this research led to the early release of 900 prisoners in Kentucky and significant changes in parole supervision designed to reduce technical violations and returns to prison. We have only begun to research and write about problems related to legal discrimination and social stigma, which appear to be more severe as computer-generated criminal background checks become ubiquitous.

The CC group emphasizes the use of direct observation and “real-life” experience in understanding the different processes, procedures, and institutional settings that comprise the criminal justice system. The methodology includes correspondence with prisoners, face-to-face interviews, retrospective interpretation of past experience, and direct observation inside numerous correctional facilities. We realize that without the research, we are just whining, overeducated cons.

Mentorship

Mentorship takes a variety of forms, including working with those who are incarcerated, felons and ex-cons in the community, and ex-convict undergraduate and graduate students and faculty. Since the publication of *Convict Criminology*, many members of the group have received correspondence from prisoners in institutions around the country and from individuals who have family members in prison. This provides us with a window into current prison conditions and prisoner concerns. Prisoners solicit advice on how to deal with institutional problems, begin a college education, publish, and/or how to plan for release from prison. Additionally, our participation in national and regional sociology and criminology

conferences has brought us to the attention of ex-con students who hear of us or are refereed by non-cons. We have not only assisted in placing students in graduate programs but also helped graduate students get their first academic jobs and deal with issues of promotion and tenure.

Many of the group members serve as role models or advisers for convicts or ex-convicts who might be thinking about earning a university degree. Some of the ex-convict members mentor students with criminal records at their respective universities. Tasks include academic advising, emotional support, and/or preparation for employment or admission to undergraduate and graduate programs. This is analogous to the way in which gay and lesbian or minority faculty may serve as advisers for some students.

It is estimated that more than 635,000 (see Austin, Bruce, Carroll, McCall, & Richards, 2001; Petersilia, 2003; Travis, 2005) men and women get out of prison every year in the United States. Some of them will exit prison and enter or return to college. Most large universities and even small colleges provide special advising services for women, gays and lesbians, persons with disabilities, and military personnel. Each of these groups has unique needs and experiences that may complicate their day-to-day living on campus and/or their success in the classroom. Meanwhile, many institutions of higher learning have completely neglected to even consider the special needs of felons and ex-convicts. No wonder many ex-convicts do not feel welcome on college campuses.

On arriving on campuses most ex-convicts find few if any academic staff or faculty prepared to advise them on matters concerning the difficult transition from prison to college, the discrimination they may experience, or how the "collateral consequences" (Irwin & Austin, 1994; Richards, 1998) of their felony convictions may affect or limit their choices of academic majors and future careers. For example, felons may not be allowed to major in education, medicine, nursing, law, or social work, depending on the college or university. These programs have good reason to deny admission because academic advisers may be concerned that their criminal convictions will prevent these students from obtaining professional licenses.

It could be argued that the CC group's most important activity is the service it provides to students. Some of these students are "nontraditional" students who are older, whereas others are "traditional" (18-22 age group) students who have been arrested or convicted of a crime while attending college. Many of the Convict Criminologists report that every semester, numerous students appear at their office doors asking for help with personal legal issues. Regardless of the specific circumstance, the responsibility of the ex-convict professor is to provide academic advising and not legal counseling.

The criminal justice system machinery processes millions of people per year through courts, jails, and prisons. A majority of these are young adults. We suggest that universities begin to consider how this phenomenon may affect potential and present students. We believe that universities have a responsibility, at the very least, to inform students of how criminal convictions might affect their career choices.

There is also a growing number of “non-con” academics who actively advise and mentor both undergraduate and graduate students with misdemeanor or felony convictions. They provide an important service for the university community. These may be faculty members who are well educated in social justice issues and have developed the capacity to aid ex-convicts when asked. They may also direct students with legal problems, felony convictions, or prison records to an ex-convict professor, if there is one employed by their university. Many of the Convict Criminologists report receiving numerous e-mails and phone calls from complete strangers—ex-convicts asking for help as they attempt to apply to university programs.

Convict Criminology College Courses

CC is now being taught in universities and prisons. The “Convict Criminology perspective” may be used as part or all of a course. The collected works of the group may be used to teach an entire course. The perspective is especially well suited for undergraduate or graduate students who are conducting research on prison, community reentry, or programs placing student interns in correctional facilities or parole-service agencies. Intellectually, the reading introduces the prisoner viewpoint as preparation for students who might be interested in careers in corrections.

Research has shown that education in general is one of the best investments individuals and society can make (Tregea, 2003). People with a high school education are more employable than those without. Prisoners with some college experience are the least likely to return to prison. Meanwhile, the federal government eliminated Pell Grants for prisoners and prevents those convicted of drug crimes from receiving financial aid. Unfortunately, prisoners became ineligible for Pell Grants when Congress passed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1993 and the Higher Education Reauthorization Act of 1994. Today, very few U.S. prisons still have college programs. How can we bring college back to the prison without federal student loans to pay for prisoner tuition (Rose, Reed, & Richards, 2005)?

In Wisconsin (2004–2007), free college courses titled “Inviting Convicts to College: Convict Criminology” are being taught by undergraduate student

teachers inside a number of medium- and maximum-security prisons (Richards, Rose, & Reed, 2006; Richards & Ross, 2007; Rose et al., 2005). The courses are free because there is no reassignment of faculty. Instead, all the classes are taught by pairs of undergraduate criminal justice students who receive internship credits and learn to teach, write their course syllabi, give lectures, prepare exams, and grade their own class of prisoner students. Meanwhile, the faculty supervise student intern teachers at multiple prison sites.

The book *Convict Criminology* is used to inspire prisoners. The convict students read the autobiographical stories of prisoners who become criminology professors. The book demonstrates how prisoners can use their time in prison to prepare for college by reading serious books and planning a new future. The courses serve as a bridge for prisoners to exit prison and enter college. In the final weeks of the course, the student teachers help prisoners complete college admission and financial aid forms. Already, in Wisconsin, a number of prisoners have exited prison to enter universities where they find ex-convict professor mentors and advisers.

The new model includes a number of innovative ideas. The classes are free because undergraduate or graduate students can teach them. University departments that include student internship programs may find our model an attractive idea for placing students as classroom instructors in prison. Deploying students in this fashion means universities do not incur the expense of reassigning faculty to teach the courses. The faculty members, in turn, are free to supervise a number of internships, including multiple placements of student interns in different prisons. The model can spread and be used easily at no expense in many prisons across the country (Rose et al., 2005).

Advocacy

The public generally likes success stories of how convicts become professors. The local, national, and international media have shown considerable interest in the concept of CC (Barton, 2006; Gieske, 2006; Railey, 2003; Ruark, 2002; St. John, 2003; Van Sant, 2003a, 2003b). Most members of the CC group have been interviewed by newspapers, radio, and/or television stations. These public appearances provide individuals in the group with an opportunity to speak out on problems concerning crime, community responses, and prison conditions. At the very least, the group provides an educated and well-informed voice to introduce and debate new ideas, programs, and solutions. The focus here is on humanizing the system, discussing problems from the perspective of insiders, and proposing solutions to problems faced in institutional settings.

The media may ask one ex-convict professor to recommend another for interviews. Together, they may use these appearances to inform the public on criminal justice issues. Ex-convict professors may also use media appearances to promote positive publicity for their universities, academic programs, and/or successful or innovative correctional programs operating inside different prisons. Media stories about the group have appeared in print in Australia, Canada, France, New Zealand, and the United States.

Members of the CC group are frequently asked to serve as invited speakers. They have addressed large audiences at universities and professional conferences, conducted workshops for criminal justice agencies, spoken at community forums, given instructional seminars for criminal defense attorneys, and served as keynote speakers inside prisons at education commencement ceremonies and “reentry summits” (the new name for prerelease programs).

The group has also called for a careful review of stigmatizing language commonly used in criminal justice articles and textbooks. For example, the use of the term “offenders” is offensive and detrimental to defendants, convicts, and ex-convicts trying to reenter the community. A felon or convict is a person (man or woman) convicted of a crime. They are still people with life histories, which is more than the term “offender” implies. Convict Criminologists suggest that authors in the field change the terms *inmate* to *prisoner*, *convict*, *men*, or *women* and *offender* to *man*, *woman*, *person convicted of a crime*, or *previously incarcerated person*. Change the words and see how the discourse improves (see Richards, 1998).

This is similar to the way feminist scholars questioned the use of gendered terms. Most mainstream academic authors continue to use the terms of law enforcement and prison administrators. This only adds to the adverse power of labels and stigma (Goffman, 1963). In fact, these negative terms may lay the foundation for deliberate or subliminal labeling or stigma assignment: The public learns to think about and identify people by criminal justice names. Unfortunately, these discrediting labels may be used to generalize a person’s moral character years after he or she has completed the relevant sentence and transformed into another person.

The Impact of Convict Criminology on the Study of Jails, Prisons, and Community Corrections

The CC perspective has contributed to the “critiquing” of studies on corrections and community corrections. With nearly 7 million Americans

currently in the custody of correctional supervision (i.e., jail, prison, probation, and parole), it is time to incorporate the voice and concerns of the men and women in jail, prison, and on probation or parole. These concerns begin with the offensive language used by academics, policy makers, and politicians, and continue with the demeaning or abusive treatment they may have experienced as defendants or prisoners.

Until now, with rare exception, the academic literature discussed *the prison* abstractly, with little attention paid to the views of prisoners. When details were provided, for example, on prison conditions or social groups within the prison, the sources were, according to academic norms, “ancient” (i.e., Clemmer, 1940; Jacobs, 1977; Sykes, 1958). Other articles on prisons were written without even interviewing or talking with prisoners. This is apparent in most articles on the subject of corrections published in *Criminology*, the field’s leading scholarly journal—researchers report their findings based on secondary data analysis, statistical summaries, or revisiting data collected on the convict social world or prison conditions decades ago. There are very few articles reporting open-ended interviews or conversations with prisoners.

The U.S. prison world is very different from one state to another. Members of the group can write with authority about what they observed or experienced in prison in different states, countries, and security levels. The CC group now includes members with insider experience and possible entry into many prison systems. For example, we now have members who have served time in the California, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin state prison systems. Add to this members who have served time in private prisons, different countries, or the Federal Bureau of Prisons. As the group grows and more observations are collected, a more complete and relatively current picture of modern prisons begins to emerge (see Irwin, 2005; Jones, 1995, 2003; Jones & Schmid, 2000; Murphy, 2003, 2004, 2005; Ross & Richards, 2002; Terry, 2003). This provides us an opportunity to compare how prison systems are different, or the same, and determine what procedures or programs may have the most promise for humane custody and possible rehabilitation.

The CC literature is now being cited in textbooks and academic journals. There is a greater appreciation for first-person, or “autoethnographic,” and retrospective accounts. In and around the same time that *Convict Criminology* first appeared in print, many academic book publishers for the first time took the risks of publishing manuscripts written by prisoners and edited by established academics (i.e., Alarid, Bernard, Johnson, Toch).

Conclusion

As a group, we have already established the concept of CC and the “New School of Convict Criminology” as brand names. As Convict Criminologists, we will continue to do what we know best. This includes mentoring prisoners and students, conducting research, publishing real accounts of prison conditions, teaching about how people experience the criminal justice system in our classrooms, and reaching out to the public, media, and our academic colleagues as a means to support the humane treatment of defendants and prisoners. The goal is to present new understandings of the problems of crime and criminal justice, to identify areas that need to be changed, and to assist those who have suffered from the effects of a prison sentence.

The next step might be to explore the possibility of opening a center for CC at a university, or partnering with a private research institute. Until this is done we will continue to publish. Through our research, teaching, and mentoring, we hope to lift the veil of false consciousness and change the social reality of crime and punishment in modern society.

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