



Book Review

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Jeffrey Ian Ross, *Introduction to Convict Criminology*. Bristol University Press, 2024; 222 p. ISBN 978-1529221206

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Introduction to Convict Criminology by Professor Jeffrey Ian Ross is a foundational textbook that organises and synthesises Convict Criminology scholarship to date. In the introductory chapter, Ross proposes the relevance and usefulness of the book might be for “current and prospective members and leaders” to consult, or for the interest of “instructors, students, convicts and ex-convicts, prison activists, practitioners, and members of the news media” (p. xviii). While reading this book and thinking about the diversity of this anticipated audience, I do not agree that this book is merely a consultation resource or a text of interest. It is so much more than that! It is a catalogue of resources; a library of research and policy ideas; it mentors the reader; provides a how-to guide for accomplishing a variety of tasks or goals, and illuminates hope for those who have been convicted within the discipline of criminology.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book and felt somewhat mentored around what it means to be a Convict Criminologist, which is ironic since the three chapters in part two are dedicated to this topic. The book goes beyond core concepts and objectives relevant to Convict Criminology. It also provides clear and practical guidance about upholding the main priorities central to Convict Criminology such as nurturing future Convict Criminologists through mentor–mentee relationships, what those mentorship relationships should entail, and what they should not entail.

The book is divided into three parts: Part 1 *Introduction and Scholarship*; Part 2 *Teaching and Mentoring*; and Part 3 *Activism and Public Policy Work*. Each part contains three chapters giving the book a total of nine chapters. The three chapters in Part 1 discuss why and how Convict Criminology was established and its development over time in academia, policy, practice and scholarship. Part 1 also explores the evolution of how it is defined and the enduring contentions associated with defining Convict Criminology as a unique discipline within the broader field of criminology. Part 2 focuses on the value of education and mentoring for incarcerated or formerly incarcerated students to foster growth in the international cohort of convict criminologists. The chapters in Part 2 provide case studies on how this has been accomplished across international jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and Italy and illuminate the benefits of fostering a generation of scholars to be active voices and contributors to criminal justice research, policy, and practice from the perspective of

those with first-hand experience. Making the case for the benefits of teaching and mentoring future convict criminologists provides the segway into Part 3 where Ross shifts his attention to discussing how Convict Criminology is applied in practice through activism and prospects for the future of Convict Criminology.

Perhaps unintentionally, *Introduction to Convict Criminology* also holds great potential to challenge stigmatising attitudes or dispel commonly held myths or (mis)perceptions for instance, in Chapter 6, Ross talks about the expense involved for incarcerated students to undertake studies when earning wages that range from \$0.10 to \$1.50 per hour. After reading this, anyone who subscribes to the mythical belief that being in prison is akin to being in a holiday camp, a view commonly portrayed by the media (Jewkes, 2007), might be challenged to reconsider their view. If any reader were genuinely concerned about incarcerated students paying their own way through education out of such meagre wages, they should rightly adjust their perception of this being more closely aligned with slave labour.

Furthermore, it shines the spotlight on the system's complicity in perpetuating the antecedent disadvantages, such as poverty, that are commonly associated with being incarcerated, rather than mitigating some of these disadvantages to increase the chances of successful reintegration. After all, this is the core business of Corrections—at least in Western democracies—to rehabilitate and reduce risks of recidivism. If anything, I hope this text fosters a greater sense of empathy in students who read it, especially those anticipating a career in Corrections.

Throughout the book, Ross provides a detailed account of the challenges and barriers to Convict Criminology study, research, and activism—especially if still incarcerated. One example that stood out to me is the advocacy work by CURE (Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants), a nonprofit organisation established over 50 years ago, which aims to promote rehabilitation for cultivating safer communities, rather than punitive responses. The idea of rehabilitation certainly features more prominently in Corrections policies, purpose statements, and anticipated goals than it did 50 years ago. However, it seems we are still advocating for Corrections to evolve beyond espousing rehabilitative ideals to embrace rehabilitative practice as their primary operating system.

In light of this reflection, the despondency about the prospect of influencing prison reform, which Ross discusses later in the book, is understandable. However, despite the challenges and barriers to overcome, this authentic text is balanced with the benefits, hopes, and prospects unique to Convict Criminologists, and accentuates that there is hope for correctional reform. History shows us that advocacy and activism can influence a shift in broader public opinions and public policies about a range of issues. Take for example the advocacy and activism of the women's suffrage movement across Anglo-American democracies, which successfully led to the earliest law reforms during the 19th and early 20th century granting women the right to vote (Caine, 2003). If persistence in advocacy and activism can achieve significant legislative reforms, then it can also shift broader public opinions and public policy to affect correctional reform. This is one of many examples, but Convict Criminology should look to these examples for inspiration and encouragement. The persistence will eventually pay off.

One of Ross' suggestions for the future of Convict Criminology is to reconsider the necessity of separate national Convict Criminology groups. There are challenges unique in some jurisdictions where activism undertaken by local Convict Criminology groups might prove to be useful. For instance, in the earlier chapters of the book, Ross promotes the idea of fostering future Convict Criminologists among incarcerated students who are studying Criminology and Criminal Justice. In the Australian context, nurturing future Convict Criminologists with

incarcerated students is hampered by education opportunities available in prison. I am not aware of any Criminology and Criminal Justice degrees available to incarcerated students in any Australian prisons. While most are now available online, incarcerated people in Australia encounter similar obstacles as their international counterparts, having very limited or no online access to engage in online learning. I am aware of one prison in Australia that permits online access to students, but provides this access with time limits and only while students are in the education rooms. Incarcerated students in this facility still heavily rely on the support of others, such as family, teachers, or friends to assist with sourcing articles and resources, or communicating with teachers on their behalf, for example. Accordingly, a local Convict Criminology group is paramount to advocate for change to these kinds of contextual nuances. Without it, the growth of Convict Criminology in Australia and the international cohort will be inhibited.

As I made my way through the book and approached the end, I was hoping for a section or chapter written to universities and Corrective Services that would implore each to prioritise a Convict Criminology course in their teaching and training endeavours. This comment is not suggesting the book contains a glaring omission but is simply a recommendation for a second edition of this text and for the following reason. Our entire Criminology discipline is predicated on the basis that people commit crime. This is foremost to everything else of interest in our field—without crime, there would be no Criminology! Yet those who have been convicted of a crime have historically not been afforded the centrality to Criminology teaching and research that someone with experience in any other field of research or practice would be given. There is a certain absurdity about that. Imagine learning how to play basketball from a person who has read about, watched, or researched the game but never played it. As a basketballer, I can assure you the coaching would be significantly sub-standard.

Convict Criminology solves this exclusion from criminology teaching and research and should therefore be a core course in any criminology degree program. Ross' book comprehensively reviews the evolution of Convict Criminology and whether intended or not, makes a strong case for Convict Criminology as an imperative within the broader field of Criminology. Although Ross does not categorically suggest Convict Criminology should be given a central position in criminological research, literature, and instruction more broadly, anyone who intently reads *Introduction to Convict Criminology* should easily come to this conclusion.

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