

BOOK REVIEWS

Convict Criminology for the Future
edited by Jeffrey Ian Ross and Francesca Vianello
New York: Routledge (2021) 248 pp.

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INTRODUCTION

Convict Criminology: For the Future, published by Routledge, is a volume edited by Jeffrey Ian Ross and Francesca Vianello. It is more than a book, rather it is a call for action and a source of inspiration for scholars and for the next generation of Convict Criminologists. This volume outlines the development of Convict Criminology within the academy in the United States and more globally. This volume also highlights where the discipline is headed, including different perspectives and voices than in the past.

Scholars within criminology are pushing for change to incorporate impacted voices into research and the conversation. Recently, academics have begun to advocate for *person first* language within scholarly writing in which the term “offender” is no longer utilized, but rather *person convicted of a crime* and instead of “inmate” using the term *incarcerated individual*. The fact that scholars are cognizant of the impact of language is an indicator that people are paying attention to the impact that language can have, and recognizing that words and the people we use to describe them matter. The establishment of the American Society of Criminology’s Division of Convict Criminology in 2020 shows that the issues of Convict Criminology are moving into the forefront of criminology. This division has been active in promoting responsiveness of issues relating to incarcerated, formerly incarcerated individuals and justice-impacted folks.

The release of *Convict Criminology; For the Future* in 2021 is perfectly positioned to be at the forefront of the revolution to raise awareness about why Convict Criminology matters not just for the academy and scholars, but for society. It seems we are currently in a climate where people are ready to hear and accept what Convict Criminology has been fighting for. Since its beginnings, Convict Criminology has strived to grow to include people from countries across the globe. With this current volume, many of the chapters are internationally focused and provide perspectives outside of the United States. This review will illustrate the importance of this book and how the works within it contribute to helping shape the future of not just Convict Criminology, but the larger discipline of Criminology.

FROM THE PAST TO THE FUTURE: CONVICT CRIMINOLOGY AS AN AGENT OF CHANGE

To understand why this volume, *Convict Criminology; For the Future* is important, it is essential to visit the past. Convict Criminology is subset of the larger discipline of Criminology. It is most closely related to the area of Critical Criminology. Convict Criminology has at its core activism and change. Its scholarly roots are in the late-1980s and mid-to late-1990s. In 1988, the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* (JPP) was established at the University of Ottawa (Gaucher, 1988). The creation of this journal was an establishment of incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals as knowledgeable entities on academic issues and this publication gave credibility to the experiences of those within the criminal-legal system. In the mid-1990s, during a peak time of mass incarceration as a result of the drug war and America getting ‘tough on crime’, scholars noticed that one of the primary people affected by the discipline of Criminology, people who are currently or formerly incarcerated for committing crime and/or justice-impacted people – individuals charged with a crime, loved ones of those who are charged, convicted and/or incarcerated – were missing from the conversation. Scholars argued that the people who are impacted should be included and consulted in the systems that affected them. This is the premise that Convict Criminology was based upon and gave way to writing and activism in that area. The first Convict Criminology academic session was in 1997 at the American Society of Criminology conference in Atlanta. This led to scholars beginning to write books and articles for publication in this area (Tietjen, 2019). In 2001, Ross and Richards (2001) published an article that introduced the area of Convict Criminology to the world. This was followed by Ross and Richard’s (2003) inaugural book *Convict Criminology*. Both are foundational pieces of Convict Criminology and established this as an area all its own. Within just over two decades since the publication of the first article on the subject, Convict Criminology has grown and has sparked a great deal of interest. This may be a direct result of the fact that it brought in the voices of those impacted and provided critical feedback to help reform correctional institutions, influence policies and practices, and assist those impacted by the carceral system worldwide. Convict Criminology also included stakeholders, such as formerly incarcerated individuals who were in the process of and/or went on to receive a PhD to assist in creation of and dissemination of

the content of the area. There was also mentorship and encouragement of formerly incarcerated and/or justice-impacted folks to go onto pursue degrees to better inform Convict Criminology (Ross, 2019; Tietjen, 2019).

Convict Criminology has evolved into other areas as time has went on to include scholars, students, and practitioners working to shed light on issues and make real change in the system and the academy. This new volume by Ross and Vianello (2021), *Convict Criminology For the Future* allows the reader to understand where Convict Criminology is headed. From the perspective of this author, this book will raise consciousness, bringing more scholars and practitioners to understand, appreciate, and be part of the movement to include justice-impacted and previously incarcerated folks in the academy and decisions on issues within the system that affect them. Each chapter in the volume is informative to the reader about the area of Convict Criminology from different perspectives, including many chapters from formerly incarcerated or justice-impacted authors, but also inspiring to the reader. In this review, each chapter will be touched upon, and an overview as well as insight into why this book is so special will be presented. Each chapter will also be mentioned as to acknowledge the work and efforts of all the valuable authors in this volume.

In the introduction, the readers hear directly from one of the founders of this area and editor of this volume, Jeffrey Ian Ross. He provides an overview of the book and gives some context as to why this volume is important. This introduction is the framework for the text and is important to understand why this book was written and what this volume hopes to achieve. The second chapter, "Context is Everything; Understanding the Scholarly, Social, and Pedagogical Origins of Convict Criminology", Jeffrey Ian Ross, as well as fellow editor for this book Francesca Vianello, provide the reader with some understanding as to why we need Convict Criminology, as well as some background. Many scholars and readers may not be aware of the history and the progression to where we are today. Both editors provide some essential information. While both chapters are introductory in nature, they provide the necessary groundwork for the rest of the book and allow the reader to learn about the history of Convict Criminology.

The next three chapters provide the reader with insights into the world of those who are incarcerated as the authors provide details about their own incarceration. These three chapters are very inspirational and powerful. They are at the heart of Convict Criminology. In chapter 3, "Crossing Borders,

Pushing Boundaries and Privileging ‘Marginalised’ Voices”, written by Sinem Safak Bozhurt, Marisa Merico, Andreas Aresti, and Sancha Darke, the issue of motherhood and female incarceration was explored in a heartfelt but also heartbreaking way. This chapter provides insight into the world of female incarceration through the stories and first-hand experiences of two of the authors Safak Bozkurt and Marisa Merico. Each tells their story in a real, accessible way that leaves the reader full of empathy for them as people and wanting to know more about their experiences. One of the main issues discussed by Safak and Marisa is how mothers who commit crime feel guilt, sadness, and like they are “bad” mothers as they have let their children or families down. This is relatable content to many readers, especially those who are mothers. The discussions of being labeled as a terrible mother or role model by family, friends and society will resonate with many. The larger discussion, which many readers will gravitate to also is that females (regardless of their status as mothers) who commit crime are “bad” or “evil” in a way that men often are not, as there is an additional stigma related to being a female who is incarcerated. Reading about the experiences of the authors in this chapter as mothers and females in prison is one of the best things that this book has to offer. These autobiographical accounts from the authors allow the reader to connect with the material in a deep way and the stories stay with you.

The next two chapters have a bit of a different focus, but still provide perspective on the lived carceral experience. In chapter 4, “Doing Time for Convict Criminology”, Rod Earle provides a dual perspective from someone who had been incarcerated and conducted research in a prison. Earle describes the benefits of autoethnography and uses vignettes in *Convict Criminology* to assist the researcher and the student/reader/person interested in the material. Writing about oneself and sharing a story through a vignette allows for the information to be disseminated and used in a way that is more accessible to reach a greater audience. Earle provides examples in this chapter of his own experiences. They are powerful to read. Readers will also appreciate that Earle writes about his experiences in the United Kingdom within this chapter. The international inclusion within this volume makes for interesting and surprising chapter information.

In chapter 5, “Convict Counter-information to Contest Crime-press Disinformation”, Elton Kalica shares their experiences of being incarcerated in Italy. Reading about the days and the life that Kalica had in an Italian prison was moving and allowed the reader to connect to the place and time.

Kalica's description as to how they were introduced to Convict Criminology and what they have subsequently achieved was inspiring. As with the other chapters, hearing the narrative in first person allows for a more sincere, deeper connection to the material. This chapter immerses the reader and they will come away with feeling inspired as to the power that writing, activism, and hope can have for individuals serving time.

Grant Tietjen and Daniel Kavish authored chapter 6, "In the Pool Without a Life Jacket; Status Fragility and Convict Criminology in the Current Criminological Era". In this chapter, the authors provide the reader with details about a perspective known as *status fragility*. This concept should be integrated into *all* Criminology curriculum from undergraduate to PhD level courses. The authors walk the reader through why this matters and how detrimental a felony conviction can be for a person, especially someone who is in a faculty role within the field of criminal justice. The authors do a beautiful job of illustrating for the reader the ways in which this status is very fragile, and how any power differential can be detrimental to their livelihood and careers. The discussion that Tietjen and Kavish offer as to placing value and worth into the lived experiences of individuals with felony convictions is essential for individuals within and outside the academy to understand. The academic institution needs to evolve into something different, and understand and appreciate that there is knowledge that lies outside of higher education that can still be valuable. Tietjen and Kavish perfectly exemplify how Convict Criminology is the future of academia and how this can also be the answer to increasing diversity of all kinds within universities and the academy. This chapter has the power to transform the readers' thoughts on what is knowledge and how higher education can adjust by the inclusion of more Convict Criminology principles.

In chapter 7, "A Convict Criminology Approach to Prisoner Families", Alison Cox provides material that is much needed and valuable for the reader. She had a graceful presentation of why it is important to remember, respect, and include the family members of those who are incarcerated or who are justice impacted. She framed this within the larger context of Convict Criminology and gave examples that allows the reader to see why this is an essential part of the future of academia. Her discussion of the future of Convict Criminology by involving prisoners' families was well thought out and particularly impactful to read. This chapter is one that readers will latch onto and think about often. This chapter is also one that should serve as part of the plan for Convict Criminology as the area advances into its next phase in the future.

As we move into additional chapters, we hear more about Convict Criminology internationally, and it is beneficial to the reader to hear different perspectives. Chapter 8, “Developing Convict Criminology: Notes from Italy”, written by Francesca Vianello, and chapter 9, “It’s time; Towards a Southern Convict Criminology”, written by Valeria Vegh Weis, both provide an international perspective. Francesca Vianello provides the history and context for the development of Convict Criminology within Italy, as well as an overview about the relationships between universities and prisons. This chapter provided thorough examples of how Convict Criminology is functioning in Italy. It is interesting to read from an American perspective to see how things differ in Italy. Valeria Vegh Weis focuses on the issue and obstacles that may arise implementing Convict Criminology in Latin America. Currently, most of the movement of Convict Criminology has been rooted in the global North, and part of the issue with the global South has been a language barrier (lack of Spanish speaking) and the fact that academics cannot make a living as a professor teaching full-time at a university. Weis provides a case study and a great discussion of why there has been a lull in the expansions of Convict Criminology and why this may continue if there is a lack of change. The best part of the chapter is where Weis offers potential solutions or suggestions as to how to expand Convict Criminology into the global South. This chapter is eye opening for readers to consider the issues faced in other countries and parts of the world where Convict Criminology is expanding.

The next two chapters focus on university courses within carceral institutions and provide results from original research. Chapter 10, “University education in Prison and Convict Criminology: Reflections from a Field Research Study”, written by Andrea Borghini and Gerardo Pastore, presents results from research with individuals from the Prison University Campus (PUC), providing quotes from interviews with incarcerated people at the PUC in Tuscany. Borghini and Pastore intermix the quotes with issues directly related to Convict Criminology and teaching university level courses in prison. This is particularly powerful for the reader. Reading the words of the principal stakeholders (i.e. the incarcerated students) makes this chapter a valuable contribution not only to this volume, but to the literature. Borghini and Pastore also explore the notion of who is a Convict Criminologist in this chapter, which has been an issue within the area as to who can call themselves a “Convict Criminologist.” The section within the chapter is informative for the reader and well written. In chapter 11, *The*

Convict University Project and the Autoethnography of the Biographical Changeover, Vincenza Pellegrino, Veronica Valenti, and Claudio Conte also present results of original research. The authors explore the Penitentiary University Campus of Parma (PUP) as a case study. This chapter provides additional understanding for readers as to what prison university campuses are like more generally and there are some insightful quotes from students in the PUP. The section on restorative community justice was powerful and gives the reader insight, but also encouragement for what lies ahead. While this chapter focuses on PUP, the lessons revealed from this research could be implanted globally. This chapter will be very useful to those wanting to conduct similar research or take part in education initiatives within a prison.

Chapters 12 and 13 are pieces which provide much needed suggestions for the future of Convict Criminology by charting for the reader where and how things need to change to improve the discipline and life within the institution for incarcerated individuals. Chapter 12, “Can the “Psychiatric Prisoner” Speak? Notes from Convict Criminology and Disability Studies” written by Luca Sterchele, provides direction for the future. Sterchele presents information about how disabled persons and prisoners suffering from psychiatric conditions are often excluded from prison programs, including education opportunities offered by universities and Convict Criminology initiatives. While the author focuses solely on Italy within this chapter, this same issue can be seen on a global scale. Sterchele presents research to help the reader understand the nature of prison cultures and why marginalized folks are left out of programs. This chapter is essential to the understanding of how Convict Criminology needs to grow in the future, as all incarcerated folks need to be part of this movement. Chapter 13, “Radicalization and Experiences in Detention”, written by Alvise Sbraccia, focuses on changing the way that Convict Criminologists and other scholars research and conceptualize life within a carceral institution. Sbraccia presents the readers with the concept of radicalization and radicalism, and how this has been applied and how it can be going forward.

Chapter 14 and 15 examine working with an institution, as well as the ethics that are involved with doing work or teaching in a carceral setting. In chapter 14, “The Reaction of the Italian Prison Administration: In the Face of a Convict Criminologist”, written by Giovanni Torrente, provides detailed information in the form of a case study about an individual within

an Italian prison, “A.T.”. Readers will enjoy reading about A.T. and what his journey was in terms of Convict Criminology and being incarcerated. Like other chapters in this volume, the individual case studies, quotes, and information allow for a connection with the material in a more profound way. Chapter 15, “Rethinking Punishment: Prison Research and the (Un)intended Challenges of Institution Research Ethics Review”, written by James Gacek and Rosemary Ricciardelli, explores an essential part of Convict Criminology related to conducting research or education within a carceral facility, the Institutional Review Board, or ethics board at a university. This chapter provides an in-depth review of the literature. The authors provide examples and solutions for issues that past researchers have faced, with good illustrations from Canada. This chapter provides context for the reader regarding a Convict Criminology approach.

The final chapter, written by the book editors Jeffrey Ian Ross and Franscesca Vianello, provide reflections on what has been learned within the area of Convict Criminology and what they believe the future has in store. They provide nine principal questions that this current book answers. This volume does answer those principal questions, but the information in this book goes beyond that. This book provides an understanding of a larger picture of the systematic issues within the United States and elsewhere, while serving as a call to action. However, in the *Conclusion*, Ross and Vianello give the reader five activities that Convict Criminologists should consider for the future. It is admirable that the editors provide the readers with such specific direction, rather than more abstract ideals without a direction. The readers of this volume who reach the final chapter will be ready to act and the editors provided concrete ways that they can.

DISCUSSION

Overall, this book is a complete joy to read. While the subject matter is heavy, it is evident in reading each chapter that the authors who contributed to this volume care deeply about the subject matter and, in many cases, the authors were directly impacted by incarceration. While there were many different authors from all over the globe, the tone of this book was consistent. Each of the authors had the same message that Convict Criminology matters and we as scholars and as humans should care about it because this area of study impacts so many people in such a profound way. Because of the tone and the

importance of this subject, *Convict Criminology for the Future*, edited by Jeffery Ian Ross and Francesca Vianello, is a volume should be on the must-read list for any criminologist. The chapters are detailed with information pertaining to Convict Criminology and each provide something unique for the reader. This is a book that can easily be used in class, and can also be used by researchers and scholars to further their understanding of this area within the discipline. While the book focuses on where Convict Criminology is headed, the nod to the past is strong and beneficial for people who may be discovering this for the first time. The authors of this volume also provide innovative and different information that even those well versed in Convict Criminology can learn something new. This may be attributed to the international chapters which give the reader rich examples, as well the inclusion of direct quotes from incarcerated individuals within some chapters.

It is my opinion that this is one of the best volumes within the area of criminology to be released within some time. The collection of chapters was well balanced. If there is one criticism that I could make, it would be that there could have been more inclusion of other countries within the book. There was a strong focus on Italy, which was very well done and thoroughly presented, as well as inclusion of Argentina and the United Kingdom which was very informative. A chapter from Australia, or an Asian or African country too could have rounded out the book. However, I applaud the editors for including so many international perspectives as it did give the readers a lot of new ideas and perspectives.

Whether people or criminologists consider themselves Convict Criminologists or see the value in Convict Criminology, we all are impacted by the carceral system. The United States currently has the highest incarceration rate in the world with 664 per 100,000 people (Prison Policy Initiative, 2021a). There are 2.3 million people currently under some form of confinement (e.g. jail, prison, youth detention) and 4.5 million under some form of supervision (e.g. confinement in institutions, probation, parole) (Prison Policy Initiative, 2020). There are over 650,000 individuals released from prison annually. Most individuals who are incarcerated are eventually released (United States Department of Justice, 2021). Returning citizens are part of our community, and in many cases our family. Everyone who is incarcerated leaves behind people, often children. A nationally representative study found that 45% of the population within the United States (113 million adults) had a family member who was incarcerated at

least one night in jail or prison (Elderbroom et al., 2018). Understanding the experiences of those people who are incarcerated or system-involved is important to so many people and their families who are impacted. Mass incarceration is not ending quickly. That is why it is my sincere belief that this volume of *Convict Criminology for the Future*, edited by Jeffery Ian Ross and Francesca Vianello, is a valuable edition to the discipline of Criminology and society more generally. Hopefully, the writings in this book will inspire future scholars to continue the fight to change the system and implement Convict Criminology in new ways and expand its reach.

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ABOUT THE REVIEWER

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Criminology's Division of Victimology Bob Jerin *Book of the Year Award* and *Faculty Teacher of the Year*. She also received the American Society of Criminology Division of Feminist Criminology *Distinguished Scholar Award* and *Inconvenient Woman of the Year Award* for her activism, as well as Feminist Criminology's *Article of the Year Award* for her sole-authored article regarding mothers of sexual assault survivors. Sam Houston State University has also recognized her for her teaching with the Faculty of the Year Award and the Community Engagement Award.