

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

Jeffrey Ian Ross and Stephen C. Richards (eds.), *Convict Criminology*. Belmont, CA: Thompson Wadsworth Press, 2003, pp xxii + 353.

As part of the Wadsworth Series on Contemporary Issues in Crime and Justice, this edited volume attempts to go beyond the coverage of typical classroom texts. The contributors, many of whom are ex-convicts-turned academics, are critical of assumptions used to justify incarceration, their central difficulty being with the way prisons dehumanise. This volume critically examines the prison institution from the perspective of the 'other.'

Part 1, "What's Wrong with Corrections," sets the stage in three chapters. Austin argues that the current criminological research focus, much of which is misinterpreted, on predators, persists or the truly dangerous, has resulted in the uncritical acceptance of incarceration as the solution. According to Ross, misrepresentations and stereotyping are the consequence of uncritically accepting of the media's take on corrections and reinforce existing crime-control practices, preventing discussions of alternative ways of doing crime control. Fisher-Giorlando reminds us that criminologists' successes, including her own, rests on the lives of men and women prisoners and that we owe it to them to devise and implement relevant policy.

Part 2, in six chapters, sets out "Convict Experience and Identity." Tromanhauser and Terry discuss the current state of conventional criminological research. Using his own life as an example, Tromanhauser reminds us that there is no simple explanation of crime causation. Terry concurs with Tromanhauser, adding that most criminological research is dominated by factor analysis and multivariate correlations' having little relevance with people's real life situations. Richards and Newbold discuss the state of social support for convicts. While Richards points out that corrections workers, more often than not, fail to interact with convicts in any meaningful or relevant fashion, Newbold argues that recidivism rates are high because many have no outside social support and reincarceration often occurs for breach of parole conditions. Thus, Newbold adds, life inside becomes easier because people learn how to adjust to life in prison. Lanier and Jones deal with adjustment to life inside and outside the prison walls. While Lanier points out that the increasing number of fathers in prison has negative psychological impacts due to their having long-term consequences for their institutional adjustment, Jones argues that

adjustment back into society is subject to inmates' interpretations of past events and their current problem-solving skills. How prisoners face these challenges, Jones points out, can tell us a lot about what might be done to help them. The final chapter in Part 2 (by Mobley) argues that a fiscally responsible penology may mean better prisons may look completely different from prisons as we know them now. But Mobley, as an ex-convict, points out that suggestions made by him and his fellow convict criminologists face resistance from both convict and academic communities because the suggestions come from ex-convicts.

The final six chapters (Part 3), a somewhat eclectic collection, are about "Special Populations"—women, the physically and mentally ill, American Indians and juveniles. wen argues that we need to understand women's experiences from their point of view, conceptualising their behaviour as expressions of oppressive social contexts both outside and inside prison walls. On the issue of caring for the physically ill, Murphy suggests that overshadowing health care with security concerns poses danger to the inmate population and ultimately the community-at-large in terms of fiscal and resource burn-out. Arrigo points out that mental health offenders are effectively silenced because they are the subjects of transcarceration between mental hospitals and prisons. Thus alternative (more positive) interpretations/labels of their behaviours are effectively negated. The legal label 'Indian' has social implications in terms of access to both constitutional rights and relevant institutional programming inside which has implications for preventing recidivism, according to Archambault. Tregoe, a little off topic, deals with preventing recidivism, arguing for relevant programming that enhance inmates' chances for productive citizenry. In addition to vocational skills, quality educational programs that teach writing, oral, critical thinking and problem solving skills are needed. He further argues for both sentencing *and* recidivism guidelines to reduce the prison population in the long run. When examining how juveniles understand their carceral experience, Elrod and Brooks assert that the official version of the institution is a sanitised and at best, simplified version of realities experienced by those who live there, and that many juveniles do not see the point of much of what goes on inside.

The concluding chapter (Richards and Ross) invites readers to think about listening to the clientele of prisons so as to make relevant prison policy that may have a better chance of reducing the prison population in the long run.

Despite a few editorial errors, the no-nonsense writing style of some of the contributors may be unpalatable for some. The shifting levels of analysis among section chapters make this volume odd and eclectic in ways. However, this volume represents a significant and valuable contribution to the field of criminology making a strong argument for qualitative research in prisons. This volume offers a view of the prison institution and its effects, from the point of view of its clientele—the inmates— and is appropriate for senior undergraduates and criminal justice policy makers and administrators.

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