

# *The New School of Convict Criminology Thrives and Matures*

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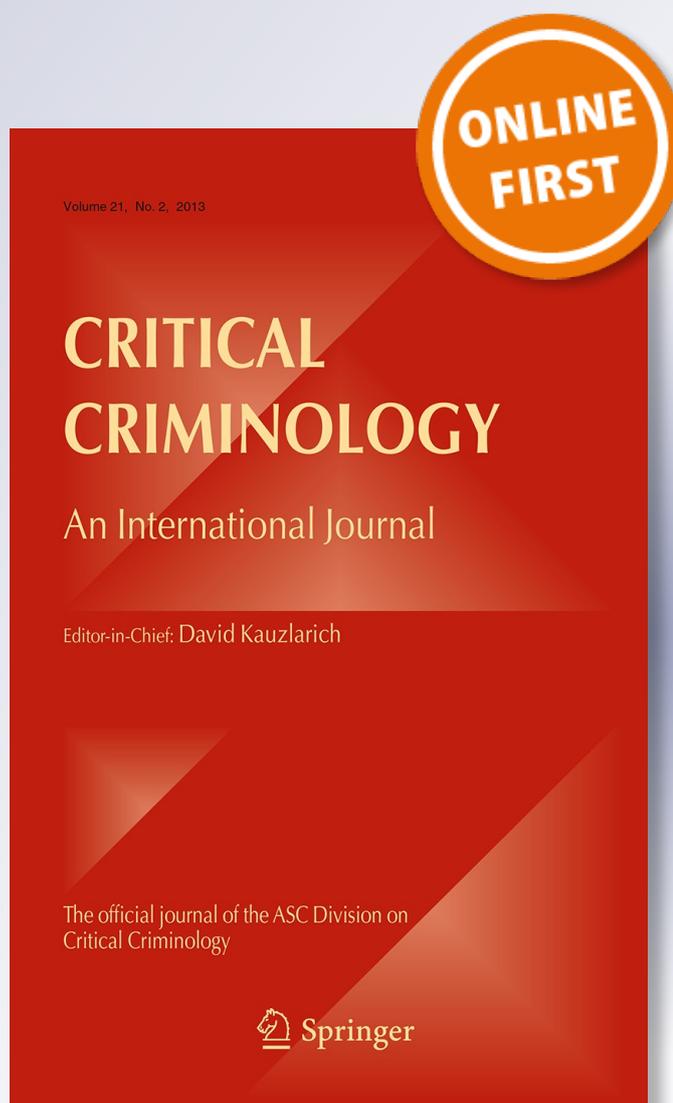
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# The New School of Convict Criminology Thrives and Matures

Stephen C. Richards

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**Abstract** This article discusses the past, present, and future of the New School of Convict Criminology (CC). A short history, including a discussion of literature, major works, and research studies is provided as is a review of Convict Criminology Group origination, membership, and activities. A first attempt at formal Convict Criminology Theory construction is presented alongside four research hypotheses. University prejudice and exclusion, as well as criminal justice hate words, are also addressed. The conclusion explores the future of CC and requests support for the movement.

We live in an age where the civil rights of women, racial and ethnic minorities, and gays and lesbians, have finally gained some legal support in the United States (US), after many years of struggle. Meanwhile, the plight of convicted felons, prisoners, and former prisoners grows more desperate. Who will dares to speak in support of the men and women who live in cages? When will the criminal pariah be welcome at our universities?

This article discusses the past, present, and future of Convict Criminology (CC). The Convict Criminology Theoretical Perspective continues to develop, thrive, and mature. The Convict Criminology Group membership grows as it attempts to serve the needs of ex-convict university students. Our main focus is on a smaller group of ex-cons working their way through social science graduate programs that may eventually earn a PhD and become a CC Professor.

## Convict Criminology is Born

Historically, we identify Frank Tannenbaum (1893–1969), Columbia University, best known for his contributions to labeling theory, as the very first ex-convict criminology professor. In 1914 Tannenbaum was a labor activist with the International Workers of the

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World when he was sentenced to one year in prison for “unlawful assembly.” He would later use his personal experience with prison to publish numerous magazine stories, journal articles, and books, including one of the best-known criminology textbooks of the 1930s, *Crime and Community* (1938). Yeager (2011) tells the story of his career as convict and then professor in his recent journal article “Frank Tannebaum: The Making of a Convict Criminologist.”

### John Irwin

John Irwin was an ex-convict who served time in California and became the best-known ex-convict criminologist identified with this perspective. In 1957, he got out of prison and attended San Francisco State University, graduating from UCLA in 1961. He then completed his Ph.D. in Sociology at University of California Berkeley in 1968. A Professor of Sociology and Criminology at San Francisco State University for 27 years, John passed away in 2010.

For 40 years John wrote about prisons. The main themes he explored included convict culture, prisoner typologies, conditions of confinement, political manipulation of the public's fear of crime and the creation of a felony underclass in the United States. He is best known for his ethnographies of prison life and innovative typologies of convict roles and identities. Richards (2009a, p. 176) notes:

In all of Irwin's books he writes about people, the folks you meet in prison. In *The Rogue* (unfinished memoir) he wrote about his own experience in prison as a convict in the 1950's [...] His analytical invention of prisoner typologies began with his own incarceration and became more refined in each book.

His typologies included thieves, hustlers, dope fiends, heads, disorganized criminals, state-raised youth, man in the lower class, square johns, petty hustlers, derelicts, junkies, crazies, cornerboys, lowriders, aliens, gays, thugs, gangbangers, outlaws, state-raised prisoners, crazies and sex offenders. John's books include *The Felon* (1970), *Prisons In Turmoil* (1980), *The Jail* (1985), *It's About Time* (1994, with James Austin), *The Warehouse Prison* (2005), *Lifers* (2009) and *The Rogue* (unfinished memoir). He was also a major contributor in *Struggle for Justice* (1971) and *Scenes* (1977).

John Irwin was one of the founders of CC. For many of us in the CC Group, John served as a mentor, confidant and friend. At the annual meetings of the American Society of Criminology (ASC) John Irwin had the academic reputation and connections to join in discussions with any group he choose to, yet one could almost always find him sitting at a table with one or two ex-convict graduate students or professors. Richards (2009a, pp. 173–174) observes:

Every year, at conferences and events, before or after Convict Criminology sessions, I introduce John to new felons, most of them graduate students struggling to complete their degrees, and wondering when they might exit the closet and publicly announce their personal truth. John helps them to prepare for their “coming out”, where they introduce themselves to the audience by relating their criminal activity, convictions, and prison time, to their research. Once they step out of the closet they are members of the Convict Criminology Group.

John takes them aside, engages them in conversation, and gives each one personal attention. He is very straight forward, as he tests their transparency, their courage to retain their own identity, despite the stigma they suffer, and the temptation to conceal

their past. Irwin understands that most felons prefer not to talk about their crimes, convictions, and time in prison, especially in public. The problem is the charade may become an elaborate subterfuge; the ex-convict slides into respectability, and then becomes a prisoner again of the secrets they keep. Their professional lie becomes a performance that inhibits their work and limits their ability to write about the subject they are determined to bury.

John had little patience for dishonest performances. He would ask very direct questions: What was your crime? Are you a dope fiend? Where did you do time? How long were inside? What do you miss about prison?

### A Short History of Convict Criminology

While we honor Frank Tannenbaum, he passed away years before CC was born. Although John Irwin retired from SFSU in 1995, a few years before our first CC session at the 1997 ASC annual meeting, he devoted nearly 15 years to helping establish the CC Group. Jim Austin also helped to open doors, secure research funding, and mentor numerous members of the group.

Convict Criminology was born of the frustration ex-convict graduate students and ex-convict professors felt reading the academic literature on prisons. In our view, most academic textbooks and journal articles reflected the ideas of prison administrators, while largely ignoring what convicts knew about the day-to-day realities of imprisonment. Instead, these works tended to gloss over the horrors of prison, inventing a sanitized presentation, without the smell of fear and noise of desperation known so well by the men and women that live in cages. Ross et al. (2012, p. 160) elaborate on this critique noting:

Many prison studies tended to approach the subject abstractly, or from secondary data sources, with little detail or differentiation among security levels, state or federal systems, or regional jurisdictions. When details were provided, for example on prison conditions or subculture within a prison, the data and sources were often outdated. Most studies were conducted without even entering the prison concerned or interviewing the prisoners.

In reply, these former prisoners now academics, working at universities teaching sociology, criminology, criminal justice, social work and related disciplines, developed a new criminological perspective to better represent the reality they knew in prison before they entered university.

We have related the long story of how CC began in previous publications (see Richards and Ross 2001; Ross and Richards 2002, 2003, 2009; Jones et al. 2009; Ross et al. 2012; Richards and Lenza 2012). The short story is that in 1997 a small group of ex-convict graduate students and professors organized a panel at the ASC conference. This session was entitled “Convicts Critique Criminology: The Last Seminar.” Ross et al. (2012, p. 162) note:

This was the first time a collection of ex-convict academics had appeared openly on the same panel at a national conference. The session drew a large audience including national media. That evening, over dinner, James Austin, John Irwin, Stephen Richards, and Chuck Terry discussed the importance and possibilities of ex-con professors working together to conduct “inside studies” of prisons and other criminological matters. This group and the scholarly work they produced eventually became known as “convict criminology.”

Since 1997, the CC Group has organized nearly fifty sessions, panels, roundtables and workshops at numerous academic events in the United States and abroad. These appearances have included plenary sessions at the American Society of Criminology, Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences and American Correctional Association. For example, in 2008, an ASC Presidential Plenary Session on CC was held, featuring Dave Curry, John Irwin, Stephen Richards and Jeffrey Ian Ross.

### Convict Criminology Book

The papers presented at this first conference led to the book *Convict Criminology* (2003). Stephen Richards and Jeffrey Ian Ross coined the term “Convict Criminology.” Ross et al. (2012, pp. 162–163) note:

In the spring of 1998, Richards spoke with Jeffrey Ian Ross, a former prison worker currently with the University of Baltimore, 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 well-known critical authors of work on corrections. In short order, a proposal was written that would eventually result in the book *Convict Criminology* (Ross and Richards 2003). This was the first time ex-convict academics had appeared in a book together that included discussion of the authors’ own criminal convictions, their time in prison, and their experiences in graduate school and as university professors.

This book has become a classic that remains required reading for anyone interested in this perspective. Many of the contributors to the text, both ex-cons and “non-cons” went on to serve as organizers of CC activities, and mentors to group members. This included working with numerous co-authors, and developing new talent that could write from this perspective. The book stimulated a body of work, authored by a growing group, that challenges many of the previous portraits of prisoners and prison.

### The Convict Criminology Group

The CC Group is composed of a small number of ex-convict graduate students and professors, and a much larger group of non-cons. While the ex-cons are the heart and soul of the group, their very survival depends upon the active support of the non-cons. Most of the ex-cons are quick to acknowledge the academic mentors that aided the difficult metamorphosis that converted a convict into an academic. Just to name a few, I wish to thank Bruce Arrigo, James Austin, Todd Clear, Walter DeKeseredy, Martine Herzog-Evans, Gilbert Geis, Russ Immarigeon, Robert Johnson, Eleanor Miller, Shadd Maruna, Joan Petersillia, Jeffrey Ian Ross, Gregory Squires, Hans Toch, and Jeremy Travis.

### Collected Works

The CC Group has also been very active examining and analyzing existing public policy concerning a wide array of criminal justice issues concerning felons, convicts and ex-convicts. Published work is predicated on both convict memory and academic research, and specializes in presenting interviews of prisoners, and innovative policy recommendations. Authors have discussed prison conditions (Irwin 1970, 1980, 2005, 2009; Richards 1995; Austin et al. 2001; Ross and Richards 2003; Terry 2003; Tregea and Larmour 2009; Richards et al. 2004a, b, 2010; Austin and Irwin 2012), jails (Irwin 1985), day reporting

centers (Richards and Lenza 2012a), private prisons (Hogan and Richards 2006), the classification of prisoners (Richards and Ross 2003a), violence in prison (Austin et al. 2001; Carceral 2003, 2005; Carceral et al. 2008; Hassine 2011), medical care in prisons (Murphy 2003, 2005), and supermax prisons (Richards 2008).

Convict Criminology Group members have also published pieces on the death penalty (Lenza et al. 2005), prisoner reentry to the community (Richards 1995; Richards and Jones 1997, 2004; Ross and Richards 2009; Leyva and Bickel 2010; Richards et al. 2011, 2012), the mass incarceration movement in the United States (Rose et al. 2010), ethnography and autoethnographic research (Irwin 1987; Lenza 2011) money, policies and crime (Lenza and Jones 2010), women guarding men (Richards et al. 2002; Murphy et al. 2008), folk knowledge of medical marijuana use for alcoholism (Lenza 2007), medical marijuana (Lenza 2012), punishments (Richards 1998, 2009a, b), as well as ex-cons applying for university faculty positions (Ross et al. 2010). Additional essays and research have included employment barriers for felons (Murphy et al. 2011, 2012), felon disenfranchisement in America (Murphy et al. 2006), prisons (Newbold 1982, 1989, 2007) and crime (Newbold 1992, 2000) in New Zealand, controlling state crime in the United States (Richards and Avery 2000), and many related topics (see the CC website at <http://www.convictcriminology.org>).

### The First Dime and Nickel

The first 15 years of CC was very productive based on the number of research studies conducted and published. These include books, journal articles, and chapters in edited books. In general the work has been critical of the criminal justice system, especially the treatment of prisoners and parolees. Writing as a collective, with different combinations of co-authors, the Convict Criminologists have critiqued and challenged existing policies and practices, as they built their own “New School of Convict Criminology” (Richards and Ross 2001, 2004; Ross and Richards 2003; Richards et al. 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011; Jones et al. 2009; Ross et al. 2010, 2012).

### *The Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*

In 2012, Stephen Richards and Michael Lenza edited a double issue of *The Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* (JPP): “A Special Issue Commemorating the 15th year Anniversary of Convict Criminology” (see Richards and Lenza 2012b). Larsen and Piche (2012, p. 1) wrote:

For fifteen years, Convict Criminology (CC) has shared many of the same commitments as the JPP, most notably privileging the voices of current and former prisoners in debates concerning penalty (Ross and Richards 2003). Convict Criminologists have also made numerous other contributions, including mentoring countless numbers of criminalized individuals as they have made the transition from prisons to their communities, as well working towards the development of reform-oriented penal policy and practices.

This journal issue was dedicated to both John Irwin and Thomas Bernard. The issue broke new ground with articles on controversial topics and the beginning of CC in Britain and Finland, and introduced a number of new ex-convict authors. Larsen and Piché (2012, pp. 1–2) continue:

We are particularly excited about this collection as a number of the articles introduce readers to some of the emerging voices within CC who illuminate important issues

pertaining to punishment and reentry through ethnographic contributions that will challenge even the most critical of thinkers to reflect upon their pre-conceived notions concerning those who are excluded from society.

The authors include 17 ex-convict academics, with several articles co-authored by veteran ex-con professors paired with ex-con students. This collaboration demonstrates how the New School continues to work to introduce and develop new ex-convict voices, and establish the next cohort to continue our movement.

### **Convict Criminology Theoretical Perspective**

Convict Criminology is a theoretical perspective that uses direct observation, face-to-face interviews, autoethnography, and retrospective analysis to penetrate the reality of distant social worlds (Richards and Ross 2001; Ross and Richards 2003; Murphy et al. 2011; Lenza 2011; Richards et al. 2010, 2011). The perspective begins with how defendants and prisoners experience criminal justice process and procedure. The analyses illustrate the journey or “forced passage” (Rodriguez 2006) people endure when they are sentenced to prison.

Most of the authors and co-authors in this perspective are ex-convicts that have become professors of criminology, criminal justice, or other related disciplines. Some of the authors and co-authors are what we refer to as “non-cons.” These are persons without felony convictions or prison records that have chosen to associate with our group and write from our perspective. You do not have to be a convicted felon, prisoner, or former prisoner to write from our perspective. Any research article that includes discussion of convict voices, and relates it to the CC literature, may be interpreted as part of the New School of Convict Criminology.

#### **Towards a Formal Composition of a Convict Criminology Theory**

It takes many years to establish a new theory in social science. The Convict Criminology Theoretical Perspective is still relatively new. Only 15 years old in the US, and just recently gaining attention in Europe, it is not yet a theory. Still, CC has already been the focus for numerous studies (cited above), and the subject of extensive examination, including John Frana’s Master’s Thesis (Frana 2010, Indiana State University) “Professors with Criminal Records: Criminology & Criminal Justice Students Views on Former Convicts as Professors,” and Grant Tietjen’s Ph.D. Dissertation (Tietjen 2013, University of Nebraska) “Exploring Educational Pathways: Reintegration of the Formerly Incarcerated Through the Academy.”

Despite our progress, the Convict Criminology Theoretical Perspective requires more formal development if it is to become operational as a theory that can be empirically tested. A formal theory requires research hypotheses that can be discussed at length. I suggest we begin the composition of a formal Convict Criminology Theory with the following research hypotheses, followed by discussion of general themes, assumptions, and concepts that illustrates the depth and breath of our research domain. These hypotheses may guide empirical observation and testing:

1. The longer a person is in prison, the more likely he/she will return.

Time is the most important theme for prisoners and prison. In general, the longer a person spends in prison the more likely they will adopt a convict identity in opposition to

authority. We suggest the transformation of an inmate into a convict occurs in as little as 2–3 years, depending upon the person, and the conditions of confinement.

Minimum mandatory sentences tend to force prisoners to do more prison time. Shorter sentences may help some individuals to rethink their lives, without adding the hostilities and resentment they learn from long-term imprisonment. Prisons are artificial worlds constructed to slowly destroy people. While many people may deserve some form of punishment, and society may demand reprimand and restitution, only the most dangerous human beings need be confined in cages and boxes. The long-term confinement of millions of human beings damages society.

2. The higher security-level of imprisonment, the more likely he/she will return.

Space is the second most important theme for prisoners and prisons. Security levels determine the conditions of confinement, and dictate the convict response. Convicts that spend many years in maximum-security will have more difficulty than inmates that spend a few years in minimum-security, and when they are released are more likely to return to prison.

While many prison systems are officially designed to transfer prisoners from maximum-security down to medium-security, and eventually to minimum-security, before releasing a man or woman to a community halfway house or parole supervision, our observation is that the opposite often occurs. The result is prisoners are transferred up the security steps as disciplinary punishment. Many men and women enter prison in minimum or medium-security only to be moved to maximum-security or solitary confinement when they break prison rules, refuse to inform on other prisoners, or develop a medical problem. Most prisoners that spend many years in maximum-security penitentiaries or solitary confinement are never moved down the security steps.

3. The more people in prison, the more social class inequality.

As social class inequality increased in the United States more prisons were built. While prisons may be one way to socially control the poor, underemployed, and unemployed, it may also contribute to even higher rates of poverty. Many people hustle illegal work to avoid poverty until they are convicted of a crime and sent to prison. When they are released from prison, given the use of criminal record checks to deny legal employment, they return to illegal work until they are convicted again and returned to prison. Poverty is both the cause of more people in prison, and the result.

4. The longer time (months, years) a prisoner spends in solitary confinement, the more likely he/she will be mentally and or physically damaged.

Mainstream criminology assumes prisons are used to habilitate or rehabilitate prisoners. Conversely, a CC assumption is that prisons may also be used to punish, damage, and even torture prisoners. Long-term confinement in solitary confinement is torture. The longer people do in prison, and the higher the security level, the more likely they will experience solitary confinement. The increase in the use of long-term solitary confinement proves that prisoners do not passively accept imprisonment.

#### University Prejudice and Exclusion

The CC Group works hard helping to resocialize ex-convict graduate students and protect them from discrimination while they finish their degrees. Each person faces obstacles in different regions of the country, and at various universities. Most of our ex-con graduate students complete their Ph.Ds. and get hired in tenure track jobs in sociology, criminology,

or criminal justice programs. We also have ex-convicts receiving doctorate degrees in social work, history, education and other disciplines.

Nevertheless, we have a few ex-convicts that completed Ph.Ds. at elite universities only to be denied university employment, due to overt discrimination given their serious criminal records. In our view, this failure to hire is entirely illogical, as it does not consider the time passed since conviction, the sentence completed, and the accomplishments of the applicant. We assume the university search committee members, or administrators that were party to decisions, were unable to summon the courage to overcome their fears.

Since 1997, we have graduated four African-American men and two white women in the United States. We also have ex-convict members in Canada, Finland, France, and New Zealand. In 2011, we added British Convict Criminology as an affiliated chapter, with their own leadership. Nevertheless, the majority of members are from the United States, and the group remains mostly working-class or middle-class white men. The War on Drugs is responsible for the majority of criminal convictions. The group does not discriminate by criminal offense. Our position is each person completed their prison sentence, those with more serious offenses suffered more time, in more severe prisons, and all should be treated the same. In general, those of us with drug convictions are more public, as we suffer less public stigma, and have an easier time in media interviews.

In the US criminal records are public and available to anyone with a computer. This makes it difficult for ex-convicts to secure housing, employment, and credit. In comparison, UK and France, and many European countries only allow law enforcement and judiciary access. They treat criminal records much like medical records, with strict privacy laws. The public's easy access to criminal records in the US has created serious issues for ex-cons that seek to attend or work at universities.

In the US convicted felons and ex-convicts have struggled to gain acceptance in academia. We depend on "non-con" support. In the US many universities now include questions about criminal records on admission forms. The federal financial aid application includes a question about drug convictions. Convicted felons, by law in some states, can be denied admission to universities, financial aid, scholarships, fellowships, graduate student assistantships, research grants, and all campus employment. Ever year, we receive numerous requests for assistance from ex-convicts denied admission to university undergraduate (e.g., business, nursing, social work) or graduate programs (e.g., sociology, criminology, and criminal justice).

More specifically, I recall a female African-American ex-convict undergraduate denied a dormitory room at my own university. She spent her first semester living in a shelter for the homeless. We know of numerous ex-cons denied admission to graduate programs or having their graduate student stipends suspended after the states passed new laws (e.g., Missouri and Kentucky). In Kentucky, after one ex-convict graduate student was stripped of his teaching assistant position, he got a job with a private company cleaning dormitories. We also know of ex-convict Ph.D. students who have been denied an opportunity to defend their dissertations (e.g., Texas) and ex-convict professors denied tenure or promotion in numerous states. Unfortunately, some private and public universities are uncomfortable with both ex-convict students and faculty.

In response, we call university presidents, provosts, deans, and department chairs, trying to understand their concerns, while arguing as best we can why they need to overcome their fears. Typically, they take my first phone call then refuse my next, after consulting their campus legal counsel. They then "circle the wagons" by forming special committees to review their campus policies, which allows them to stall and obstruct. Despite their university mission statements about diversity, inclusion, and life-long learning, they

somehow think ex-convicts are too different and dangerous to join their campus community. When I get tired of their stalling tactics, I call the lawyers who are pleased to file suit. We have already fought and won several legal actions.

### Criminal Justice Hate Words

One of the lessons of CC, that we learned in part from the advances made in feminist and gay studies, is that we must learn not to use the words of criminal justice administrators and state funded researchers when discussing defendants, prisoners, and prisons. Richards and Ross (2003c, p. 244; see also Richards and Ross 2003a, b; Ross and Richards 2003) wrote:

Fair warning, beware any research that discusses men and women as “offenders” or “inmates.” This is the official language used by prosecutors, judges, jailers, prison administrators, and the media to degrade and dehumanize. Even persons with better intentions use these words because they are so rarely challenged. Still, the words we use are important. It is no surprise that most prison research reflects the language and special interests of the prison bureaucracy. After all, the government funds the research and therefore sets the agenda, limits the parameters, and decides if the final report will collect dust on a shelf or be read and used to inform new policy and procedure.

Whereas most academic research on prisons uses the words “offenders” and “inmates,” we do not, except when discussing or quoting official prison policies or administrative positions. Instead, we prefer to use the words prisoner or convict in place of inmate. When possible, we will discuss prisoners as men or women; and, defendants and prisoners as persons, men or women, convicted of criminal offenses. At the very least, we seek to sensitize the reader to their choice of words.

Unfortunately, academic criminology and criminal justice textbooks, course materials, and curriculum are largely based on theoretical ideas and language loaded with pejorative and prejudicial assumptions. In many ways it is reminiscent of the racist language used by anthropologists in the 19th and early twentieth century to discuss aboriginal populations in undeveloped or colonial countries. Richards wrote (1998, pp. 142–143; see also Richards 1990, 1995, 2009a; Jones et al. 2009):

Rehabilitation, corrections, retribution, incarceration, incapacitation, abscond, and recidivism are all made up words...There are so many ugly words in criminology, criminal justice, and corrections. Traditional textbooks are filled with hate words used to generalize “them” as criminal offenders: Criminal, convict, parolee, jailbird, murderer, rapist, thief, armed robber, burglar, sex offender, child abuser, pedophile, pederast, embezzler, forger, drug abuser, drug dealer, career criminal, recidivist, the list is endless, all made up words loaded with prejudice. Prisoners of the state do not use these words, they know better. These are labels assigned by the state to punish, that do not do justice to the lives of men and women who may have had one bad day, a brief career, or periodic episodes with breaking the law.

The language used to critically describe and analyze crime, criminals, and corrections, has improved in the social justice, feminist criminology, and peace criminology literature. The literature has improved with critiques of the state, feminist perspectives, and attempts to theorize about a demilitarized approach to community,

but it is still a prisoner of privilege, written without the necessary anger and horror.twentieth century to

As listed above, criminal justice “hate words” are the linguistic foundations for the domestic colonization, so apparent in the criminalization of poverty, and the mass incarceration of marginal populations in the US. As it is no longer legal to use racial hate words, social control authorities simply employ criminal justice language to accomplish and support similar social-economic patterns and policies of segregation and isolation.

### **Conclusion: The Future of Convict Criminology**

For those of us that have suffered the prison, there is no intellectual debate about the relative merits of mainstream versus critical criminology. We know what side we are on. The journey to prison and back informs our ontological understanding of the horror of imprisonment. Our collective disgust and resentment with a justice system that locks up millions of people in cages and boxes may fade over time, but it does not relent. The memories remain, as we are the witnesses. Mainstream criminology is not innocent. Our discipline and profession is both compliant and actively complicit in the penal damage visited upon millions of Americans. Thankfully, there are critical criminologists that have the courage to defy the prison, and support the witnesses to share what they recall.

The future of CC is by no means assured. Although CC Group membership continues to grow our ranks of ex-convict professors remain thin. I picture three interrelated cohorts. The first cohort is composed of senior faculty, some of whom will retire in the next 5–10 years. The second cohort includes the assistant professors that will lead the CC Group in the near future. A number of these already show great promise as researchers and authors. The biggest question, at least in my mind, relates to the third cohort. These are the young men and women that have just entered graduate school, and one-by-one, jumping through hoops, will find their own path from convict to professor. Hopefully, there will be critical criminologists available to mentor this second and third cohort. We depend on the support of hundreds of non-con professors and university administrators working at universities in the US and other countries to help ex-convict students and faculty, sometimes at the risk of their own careers.

Despite our success, ex-convict professors are still just a few dozen, including those in the US, United Kingdom, New Zealand, Canada, France and Finland. Regardless of the state or the country for that matter, while it may be safer to play it low profile, it compromises our ability to support all the prisoners coming out of prison that manage to gain admittance to a university. At many universities the ex-con professors work to advise and mentor the many ex-students that ask for help. Most of us spend a lot of time attending to the academic dreams of felons and ex-convicts that find us because our work is public. Our hope is that every large university in the country comes to realize that they need to hire ex-con professors or at the very least academic advisers to serve felons, as much as they hire people to advise women, minorities and non-traditional students.

In the US there are over seven million men and women presently under correctional supervision who need to know their voices and experiences matter. Every year some 600,000 men and women are released from prison. Only a small number will exit prison to enter college. Of these, a few rare individuals will make it into graduate school. Maybe one or two ex-convicts per year, in the entire world, will complete a Ph.D. in criminology or a related field of study. I ask that the reader lend a hand, open a door, and defend the witness, so their truth will be written.

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