

## [ book reviews ]

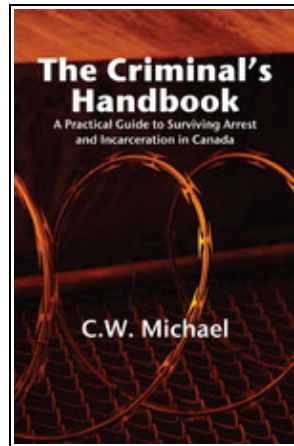
### ***The Criminal's Handbook: A Practical Guide to Surviving Arrest in Canada***

Michael, C.W.

(London, ON: Insomniac Press, 2012. 288 pages.)

Reviewed by—Tom C. Allen,  
*Kwantlen Polytechnic University, July 2013*

Most criminal justice books are written from the perspective of academics in ivory towers who have never had to deal with police officers who can legally lie during interrogations, ‘dump truck’ lawyers who take on far too many cases, or correctional officers who exaggerate reasons to lock down institutions so they can collect overtime. C.W. Michael’s, *The Criminal's Handbook*, is an excellent resource not just for anyone who is in conflict with the law but for anyone interested in learning about the Canadian criminal justice system from the perspective of someone who has been there.



‘Truth’ needs to be understood not just from the top but also from the ground. I showed this book to a couple of colleagues<sup>1</sup>, both with psychological backgrounds, and they summarily dismissed the text with ‘It’s anecdotal’ and ‘Where are the random

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<sup>1</sup> I am currently a criminology faculty at a Canadian university.

samples?’ This saddens me and leaves me to question the production of ‘truth claims’ in the university classroom. As the author states,

A popular publication used by criminologists, students, and puppeteers of criminology is the *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, a journal which is partly funded by CSC [Correctional Services Canada]. One should wonder if that is much different from a tobacco corporation keeping a doctor on the payroll to issue reports on the health effects of smoking (86).

To understand the street we must hear the voices from the street. Michael gives us this voice and with passion, humour, intellectual curiosity, and insight—all supported with creditable research.

Did you know that you can go to jail for throwing a snowball in Manitoba? Did you know that “if someone is dying in front of you, you’re not legally bound to help (except in Quebec), but you must call the police if they talk about breaking the law” (20)? Michael reveals many such interesting observations as these while he offers a wealth of good practical advice for anyone involved in the ‘McJustice system.’ For instance, Michael explains why, upon arrest, you need to first obtain bail and then have your lawyer negotiate an easing of the conditions a month or two later. Or, he offers the fact that should your lawyer arrange a plea bargain in which the prosecution agrees to drop all charges except one, this does not mean the dropped charges disappear. Indeed, they may reappear: for instance, when you are applying for parole and the parole board sees the ‘dropped charges’ in your file.

Michael frequently intersperses his observations and considered comments with quotes from philosophers and learned intellectuals to succinctly illustrate his points. For instance, quoting William Pitt, “Necessity is the plea for every infringement of freedom. It is the argument of tyrants; it is the creed of slaves” (16). He says that he doesn’t watch TV but spends his time reading and learning. It is evident that Michael knows his stuff and at times he surprised me with his observations, even though I have been teaching criminal justice system courses for close to 20 years and I am a former prisoner myself.

Michael takes an unequivocal position on the failures of Canada’s system of injustice. He makes clear how the fear of

crime is furthered through the media and entertainment industry and how "More laws, prisoners, and tax dollars mean more security and financial gain" for them (148). Further, he writes,

I find it very odd how the wrongfully accused or convicted who eventually win an appeal can say the system works. If the system really works, they should not have been charged or convicted in the first place. (141)

However, he also offers informed instruction on how we could better achieve public safety and community integration. Michael borrows from Michel Foucault to show that "the ceremony of punishment ... is an exercise of 'terror' to make everyone aware, through the body of the offender, of the might and power of the law and justice system" (133). Michael explains how Canada's current 'tough on crime' legislation makes "it easier for the 'professionals' of the justice system to steal away the conflict, thereby robbing local communities of their ability to face trouble and restore peace" (108). He contrasts this retributive approach to "community projects of restorative justice [that allow] healing, reconciliation, and giving back to the community" (109). He cites Professor Alan Young, "Compassion requires emotional engagement inconsistent with the adversarial ethic" (111). Michael argues for community-based approaches to public safety showing how programs delivered in the community are far more effective than those offered in a prison. Yet, parole and other forms of conditional release have been plummeting in recent decades.

As Michael states, only Russia and the United States surpass Canada's incarceration rate. He notes how correctional programs in prison can actually "increase the likelihood of offending" (207). Not what most Canadian citizens would expect from their tax dollars. Michael illustrates doing time in segregation or the punishment cells.

One popular conception of time in the hole is that it drags by ever so slowly but seems to have flashed by in the end. It's a weird thing to explain. It seems to drag because you sit and stare at a blank wall all day or pace for hours. It's what I did for twenty-eight straight months. It was the insanity of such boredom that led me to begin writing these words. When the end comes, it's as if it passed in a blink (196).

This book by C.W. Michael is written from a place of informed thought and hard experience and deserves wide exposure. It is not only 'a practical guide to surviving arrest in Canada' but is an excellent text for courses in criminal justice as well as a resource for anyone wanting a meaningful understanding of Canada's system of arrest, trial and punishment.

This book is accessible and fun to read. It is entertaining and illuminating and it is a read that goes by 'in a blink.' I was left wondering why such a fine writer would want to remain anonymous and use a pseudonym. I felt excited, illuminated, and aroused by the images and I couldn't put the book down. Recommended.

## REFERENCES

Michael, C.W. (2012). *The Criminal's Handbook: A Practical Guide to Surviving Arrest in Canada*. London, ONT: Insomniac Press.



## ***The Anti-Capitalist Resistance Comic Book***

Hill, Gord.

*Foreword* by Allan Antliff;

*Introduction* by Dave Cunningham

(Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2012. 96 pages.)

Reviewed by—Mike Larsen,

*Kwantlen Polytechnic University, June 2013.*

Gord Hill's *The Anti-Capitalist Resistance Comic Book* presents a narrative account of the history of anti-capitalist mobilization from the standpoint of participants involved in direct action. Hill stops short of explicitly identifying himself as one of the central characters, but there is an autobiographical tone to the work: most of the events depicted in *The Anti-Capitalist Resistance Comic Book* are seen from the perspective of militant members of Indigenous, anarchist, and anti-capitalist social movements who hail from occupied Coast Salish territory.