



## Book Review: Justice Blind? Ideals and Realities of American Criminal Justice

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*Justice Blind? Ideals and Realities of American Criminal Justice* By Matthew Robinson

2002. Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle, NJ.  
ISBN: 0-13-033444-8      \$34.80.

The events of the last two years have created a strong need for good, informative textbooks to be used for introductory criminal justice courses. After the events of September 11, 2001, a renewed desire to work in the field of criminal justice appears to have been awakened across the nation. A majority of academic programs offering degrees in criminal justice and criminology have seen increases in student populations. With this in mind it would seem that the timing would be right for a new textbook written to introduce to those who have either decided on, or are considering, a career in the criminal justice field. In *Justice Blind? Ideals and Realities of American Criminal Justice*, Matthew Robinson claims to have provided just such a work to introduce the field of criminal justice to those new to the discipline.

Unfortunately, *Justice Blind?* falls short of its declared goal. The book does in fact introduce potential readers to the various aspects of the criminal justice system, and all facets of the criminal justice system are included. However, the book is not written in such a manner as to inform the reader of how the criminal justice system works or to provide an introduction to the system. The book instead introduces each portion of the criminal justice system as the author attempts to argue that the system is defunct, prejudiced, and corrupt. Throughout the entire work there is perhaps one section that discusses the criminal justice field without being completely influenced by the author's personal opinions. While an author's thoughts, and most likely even opinions, are necessary to the successful writing of a textbook, there are times when the two can be overloaded within the text. This is the case with *Justice Blind?*

It should be noted here that Robinson's assessment of the criminal justice system is thought provoking in many respects, but also contains several sections that are inconsistent for readers. In these sections of the book, readers are introduced to a particular concept only to read later in the book that the author has taken what would appear to be the exact opposite viewpoint. The use of this writing style potentially provides for a

situation where readers will leave the work with a feeling of contradiction.

In examining the contradictions provided in the text, perhaps the best example is related to the author's discussions on tobacco and narcotics. Early in chapter six (pp. 160-196) the author claims that cigarette smoking is far more dangerous than any of the illegal drugs, but he is especially adamant that cigarettes are more harmful than marijuana. It is in this section that Robinson attempts to persuade readers that cigarettes should be illegal, much the same as marijuana is illegal. In fact, a comparison is made between the two where the author provides examples of how dangerous both drugs are to potential users. However, later in the same chapter the author argues that drugs such as marijuana should be decriminalized on the basis that they are less harmful to users than tobacco and that the use of marijuana is a victimless crime. Credit should be given to the author, however, for articulating the difference between legalization and decriminalization. Unfortunately, the result remains that the author argues for criminalization of tobacco and then decriminalization of marijuana. Despite the arguments presented by the author, such as there has never been a death caused by marijuana, the reasoning used could lead a reader at the introductory course level to a point of confusion.

The author also uses the textbook as a means of voicing his personal outrage against white-collar crime. In fact, an entire chapter is devoted to this issue, "Which is Worse, Crime on the Streets or Crime in the Suites" (pp.67-95). In this chapter Robinson argues that corporations commit as much, but likely more, crime than do individuals who commit street crime. It is also Robinson's contention that crimes involving corporations are more dangerous to society than crimes committed by those associated with street crime; however, these acts are not considered wrong because they are not illegal or do not result in serious punishment. As a means of reinforcing this argument, Robinson contends that an act is only wrong if society considers the act wrong and passes legislation criminalizing the act. It is here that Robinson argues there is no such thing as crimes that are mala in se (wrong by nature), only crimes that are mala prohibita (prohibited by law). In providing proof of this claim, he uses the example of rape against a man. According to Robinson, an act is not wrong unless the government

passes legislation providing that the act is wrong. Therefore, the act of rape against another male is not wrong because there are several states that do not recognize same-sex rape. While it may be stated that an act such as same-sex rape lacks clear statutory guidelines, it is unreasonable to believe the rape is not wrong merely because it is not made illegal in the statutes.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned critiques, there is a place for Robinson's book in criminal justice curriculums. *Justice Blind?* was written in a very engaging style, making the book very easy to read. The writing style should encourage reading among underclassmen who would be assigned the book as part of their assignments. With this in mind, perhaps one of the best uses for the work would be its use for a junior or senior level special topics course. In the work Robinson provides a rather exhaustive examination of prior research concerning various problems facing the criminal justice system. This in-depth examination of many of the problems facing the criminal justice system would appear to make the work capable of providing thought provoking discussion among students who are already familiar with the issues discussed in the text. However, students should have a prior understanding of the criminal justice system before they attempt to discuss these issues, so as to prevent confusion when encountering the sections where Robinson's personal beliefs and opinions generate a sense of contradiction.

Robinson's final chapter is entitled "Where To Go From Here: Alternatives to Current Criminal Justice Practice". In this chapter the author provides a listing of fifty recommendations on how to improve the criminal justice system and allow for the provision of maximum justice. These recommendations range from idealistic to thought-provoking and provide sufficient information to provoke intelligent debate among upperclassmen in the proper setting. For example, recommendation number seventeen is where Robinson argues that the media must be required to only provide accurate news and no longer allow for the presentation of "sleazy" news. In other words, if society were to refuse to allow the production of crime television and sensational news, then individuals would no longer remain inside their homes fearful of poor people and people of color. Whether this is true could be debated; however, it is idealistic to believe that we can expect society's desire for crime

television to be taken away. On the other hand, Robinson's twenty-third recommendation deals with developing educational requirements for American police officers. Of course the hiring of better educated officers could benefit the society they would serve. However, such a provision would also cost society in the form of increased pay rates for these police officers. Relying upon the foundation laid by Robinson with these recommendations, an undergraduate class could easily discuss the lengths to which society should be willing to go to improve both their quality of life and criminal justice personnel.

The book definitely has a place in the study of criminal justice. However, it would seem that Robinson's *Justice Blind?* is not well suited for an introductory textbook, as it is billed in the opening segments of the book. Instead, the work is better suited for use in a course with the intent of its participants reading, understanding, and discussing issues facing the criminal justice field. Robinson, while providing a significant amount of information throughout his book, also allows his own personal views to bias his writing. Due to the fact Robinson bills the textbook as an introduction to criminal justice his personal prejudices impacts the work's applicability to his desired audience. An introductory textbook should be just as its name implies, an introduction to each of the various aspects of the criminal justice system. Here, readers are introduced to all aspects of the criminal justice system, but they are only provided with what is wrong with the system. Robinson neglects the job of discussing any successes or positives associated with the criminal justice system. Readers of *Justice Blind?* may find themselves convinced that there is no hope for improving the criminal justice system and decide they desire nothing to do with the field. Individuals who desire to teach an introductory course should consider using one of the books Robinson refers to in his preface - books that provide information on how the criminal justice system should operate. *Justice Blind?* should be used as either the primary text or accompanying text when the instructor desires a course instilled with debate and thought-provoking discussion, both of which are better suited for individuals familiar with the criminal justice system and not for those being introduced to criminal justice.