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Review – Canadian Policing in the 21st Century

Canadian Policing in the 21st Century

By Robert Christmas

Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press. 2013.

The author of this book has been a serving police officer with the Winnipeg Police Service for over twenty years. This book examines twenty years of change that have occurred within Canadian policing and the challenges that currently exist for front line policing. A police officer perspective is provided, allowing the reader insight into police culture and the Canadian criminal justice system. The book may also inspire some individuals to pursue a career in law enforcement.

Each chapter of the book attempts to build on previous chapters enlightening the reader with roughly 250 pages of material that covers broad issues including history, service and technological changes, demographics, training, Aboriginal peoples, race, gender, governance, transparency and, the accountability of police.

Chapter 1 through to 4 discusses the history, roles and general changes that have occurred within Canadian policing. These chapters provide an informative background to the reader who has little or no knowledge of the contemporary landscape of policing. The first three chapters of the book present a backdrop for contemporary policing with emphasis on the changing expectations that society has placed upon their policing services including the increased costs associated with justice and the high standards that have evolved. Chapter 4 outlines how recent technological advances have altered police work for both the better and the worse. Included with this analysis is how globalization, borderless crime and terrorism have become issues of concerns for all police agencies within Canada, regardless of size or jurisdiction due to the pervasive and influential nature of the Internet.

Chapter 5 and chapter 6 discuss how demographics and trends are influencing training and education within policing. Issues such as lifelong learning and the need for advanced education are addressed as well as the trend for improved capacity, through collaboration with other law enforcement agencies and, by way of community partnerships.

In chapter 7, the author explores policing issues specific to aboriginal peoples in Canada. An historical outline is presented setting the context for contemporary times and the challenges that Aboriginal peoples face. Canada's Aboriginal youth gangs, restorative justice concepts and aboriginals in policing are briefly presented and discussed.

In chapter 8, aboriginal-police relations are portrayed including the thorny issues of racial profiling and racism. The author also explores the history of women in policing and the challenges that exist in creating a work force that is balanced, fair and free of harassment. Issues related to the recruitment, promotion and retention of women in policing are presented.

Chapters 9 through 11 discuss police governance, transparency, accountability and changing police strategies. Performance measurement, managing change and the concept of reflective practice are outlined. Crime prevention and the need to examine the underlying causes of conflict, while providing solutions directed at the root causes of crime and disorder, are reflected upon in the concluding pages of the book. It is suggested that police can be advocates for change and that their role is much broader than just providing a law enforcement function.

The primary strength of this book is that it provides an overview of the challenges and issues being faced by police agencies across Canada. The writing is concise, clear and informative. Throughout the book the author injects his personal experiences as a police officer as well the perspective of the police culture that serves to influence and shape the Canadian criminal justice system. Overall, the book is easy to read and understand. Individuals that have a desire to learn more of basic contemporary policing issues will benefit by reading this book.

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