Over the course of our combined 100-plus years of undergraduate teaching, we have reviewed and used many different introductory textbooks for criminal justice. Indeed, two of us, Larry Mays and Tom Winfree, began our undergraduate studies during the 1960s and 1970s, when there were few colleges or universities that even offered coursework in this subject. By the mid- to late-1970s, as Larry and Tom began teaching in criminal justice departments, introductory textbooks were very new and more resembled sociology of criminal justice textbooks than ones dedicated to the emerging discipline of criminal justice. For her part, Leanne Fiftal Alarid is a product of the second generation of introductory criminal justice textbooks, published in the 1980s. Leanne, like her two coauthors, has contributed to the discipline of criminal justice, through both research and textbook authorship. In short, we began this effort with a wealth of experience and knowledge about the discipline of criminal justice, in both its contemporary form and its historical context.

More than a decade ago, we began a discussion about what we thought was missing at the introductory level. We have taken our experiences as students and teachers to heart and crafted what we believe is a textbook that is student-centric and informative without being encyclopedic. We relate the origins and development of criminal justice as an academic area of study and its potential as a workplace, since an entry-level position within the criminal justice system is often an eventual career choice for those beginning such a course of study. We do not sugarcoat the work world of criminal justice, revealing it instead as it is described and understood through the best scholarly evidence available. As authors, we are a mix of former practitioners and current academics who believe that whether the readers of this textbook seek careers as scholars or practitioners or simply wish to be better-informed citizens of the community, it is best to make decisions that are based on carefully reasoned arguments and highly verified evidence. This perspective guided us in the preparation of this textbook.

Our textbook is a departure from many other introductory textbooks currently available. First, this is an *essentials* book. As
you hold the book or view it electronically, you know that this subtitle does not literally translate as “shorter” or “the basics.” Rather, the material we included in this textbook is what we believe is necessary to achieve the following goals.

- First, the text provides the casual readers with sufficient information and understanding of how the nation’s criminal justice system functions so that they might be better-informed citizens.
- Second, and along the same line, for students of this subject who intend to further their studies, this text establishes a foundation for the essential tools required to advance their interest in criminal justice. These tools include general critical thinking skills, an analytical and evidence-based approach to the subject matter, and a generalist perspective that can be expanded on by advanced studies in criminal justice.
- Third, for those who intend to pursue a career in criminal justice, this book gives unvarnished, balanced, and current insights into how the system should function and how it does function. This information should allow the preservice individual or the current CJS employee seeking advancement through academics to approach his or her respective goals in a better-informed manner.

How do we achieve these goals? The answer to this question is straightforward. We employ four specific teaching devices. First, we emphasize the historical development of all the component parts of the nation’s system of criminal justice, including its evolution as an area of academic study. As George Santayana famously stated, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (1905: 284). As you will learn in this text, many criminal justice pundits and even so-called experts have shown that there is much truth in Santayana’s aphorism. As importantly, and as observed by William Shakespeare in his play The Tempest, “What’s past is prologue.” For those studying criminal justice, this quotation means that we need to understand the past, since history influences and sets the context for the present. The past is often the path to the future. The truth of this statement will also become clear as, for example, we look at such things as the militarization of policing agencies throughout history and societal tinkering with various punishments intended to reduce crime. A historical perspective is essential if one is to understand more fully where we are now in terms of the administration of justice and where we are headed.

Second, throughout the text we encourage the reader to develop a cross-national or comparative orientation. Whether studying
criminal justice in a historical context, as with the development of policing in England and Wales or the evolution of Roman laws, or in its contemporary variant, as with examples of how other nations approach the same crime and justice issues that confront the United States, we strongly encourage students to look beyond this nation’s borders. Crime is increasingly a global issue, respecting neither international borders nor geographic barriers. When looking at crimes with the global reach of human trafficking or artwork stolen by the Nazis during World War II that later surfaces in a national gallery, having a comparative criminal justice perspective informs our responses to a wide range of criminal activities. Indeed, the final chapter of this book explores a series of such concerns, all through a comparative lens.

Third, we present this material in a consumable, student-friendly fashion. We provide many definitions, as evidenced by the extensive glossary. We relate the information in as nontechnical a fashion as possible but build on the readers’ early knowledge throughout the text, so that by the final chapter, they are able to apply the lessons of the previous thirteen chapters in the exploration of this final set of national and international challenges.

The fourth teaching device we employ—one related to issue of student consumption—is the inclusion of a series of review questions at the end of each chapter. These are more than make-work assignments. In most cases, the answer to the question does not lie in the regurgitation of a series of facts found within the text. In some cases, readers may need to look more broadly for supporting evidence or provide their own analysis. We are strong proponents of the exercise and development of critical thinking skills, and these questions should help to hone those of readers on the whetstone of criminal justice. In this vein, we also include critical thinking questions, ones for which there may not be a “right” or “wrong” answer, but which will cause the students to think about the issues at hand.

A brief review of the text’s content may prove useful at this juncture, if only to give readers a sense of what lies ahead.

Chapter 1 (“Criminal Justice: An Overview”). This chapter provides a definitional framework for the remaining chapters. A key part of this chapter is simply defining justice and criminal justice. While these terms may seem intuitively straightforward, Chapter 1 reveals that this is far from the case as it explores their more subtle and complex natures. The chapter ends with an overview of the meaning of the criminal justice system in contemporary society.

Chapter 2 (“Defining and Reporting Crime”). Crime is more prevalent today than ever before, right? In fact, the rate of crime is lower
today than in previous decades, even if the volume of crime is, in some cases, higher. Readers who think that this answer is a case of weasel wording should read Chapter 2 very carefully. What they will learn is that there are many ways to measure and report crime. Knowing how much crime there is and the trends in its occurrence is central to understanding how a society responds to it.

Chapter 3 (“Criminal Law and the Legal Environment”). It is often said that we are a nation of laws, and this chapter provides an overview of criminal law and the broader legal environment within which criminal law is created, interpreted, and enforced. To understand fully the criminal justice processes in the United States, readers must have at least a basic appreciation for key concepts embodied in criminal law.

Chapter 4 (“An Introduction to Policing”). For many students of criminal justice, this chapter signals the beginning of the core of the course. It is here that they will begin to appreciate the true impact of history on the evolution and development of a central piece of the criminal justice system. In addition, this chapter introduces them to contemporary policing, including its goals and objectives, structure and organization, and activities.

Chapter 5 (“U.S. Law Enforcement Agencies”). Few textbooks contain the breadth of coverage on law enforcement that we provide. From local and state agencies to the range of federal responses to crime and justice, this chapter reveals a great deal about the agencies and the people who populate them, serving their communities and the nation.

Chapter 6 (“Issues in Law Enforcement”). If a textbook claims to cover all the issues related to a single element of the criminal justice system, that claim is probably false. In this chapter, we reveal essential information about the following topical areas in law enforcement: professionalism, corruption, use of force, and police-judiciary interactions. There are certainly other issues confronting law enforcement agencies today, as instructors may indicate during the course of covering this content area. Indeed, Chapter 14 discusses at least one more, police militarization. Chapter 6 is intended to give readers an understanding of several of the key problem areas that confront police in the 21st century.

Chapter 7 (“Local, State, and Federal Courts”). Many people have only a passing familiarity with this nation’s courts. Usually that knowledge comes through appeared for a traffic ticket or after
receiving a summons to serve on a jury. This chapter provides a review of the different kinds of courts found at all three levels of government in the United States. In addition to giving basic definitions, it also explains the functions of different types of courts at all levels.

**Chapter 8 (“Trials and Trial Procedures”).** Much of what the average person knows about court processes comes from television and movie depictions of various aspects of trials. Some of this information is accurate, and some is inaccurate (to provide greater drama). This chapter follows criminal cases through the various stages that occur when cases go to trial. However, one important point is worth emphasizing again and again: Somewhere between 80 and 90 percent of all of the criminal cases filed in this country are resolved with something other than a trial, most through a process of negotiated settlement known generally as plea bargaining.

**Chapter 9 (“Issues in the Judiciary”).** As with the other “issues” chapters, there is no end to the possible questions and controversies that could be covered here. We have chosen to focus on how attorneys are provided for the majority of criminal defendants who cannot afford to hire their own; how judges are selected in the United States and their qualifications; and how we discipline judges who misconduct themselves in their personal and professional lives. Although other issues are included, three in particular are likely to spark interest and classroom discussion: the use of scientific evidence in court (such as DNA testing), wrongful convictions and the impact they have on the perception of justice, and the lingering controversies surrounding the death penalty. We expect this chapter (along with the other issues chapters) to draw students and instructors into serious discussions.

**Chapter 10 (“Probation and Community Corrections”).** Since the vast majority of sentenced offenders serve their correctional sentence on probation in the community, we thought it important to introduce the most common ways that individuals serve correctional sentences while living at home. We address how restitution, fines, and community service are used to financially compensate victims and help the community. We also discuss technological advances in electronic monitoring of offenders, including the ramifications that technology has for the increased chance of registering probation violations and how this has contributed to net widening and jail crowding.

**Chapter 11 (“Institutional Corrections”).** This chapter reviews the historical background of punishment and penitentiaries to address
the full context behind how penitentiaries began and how incarceration rates in the United States became so high. Students will understand how the United States is different from other Westernized countries in response to crime. This chapter covers the different types of correctional institutions, including jails, prisons, youth detention centers, and private facilities, all of which have the primary goal of depriving offenders of their liberty and various freedoms as part of their sentences.

Chapter 12 (“Living and Working in Prison”). Students of criminal justice have always been interested in what prison might be like; often they believe that prisoners have an easy life. This chapter challenges that argument and gives students a glimpse into life behind bars. They will read what doing time is like, why prisons can be violent and unsafe places, why decent prison conditions are important, and how women’s prisons are different. The goal of this chapter is to enlighten the student on the importance of having a safe environment for the correctional staff members who make up the foundation of the prison environment.

Chapter 13 (“Issues in Corrections”). The corrections system currently faces a multitude of challenges. This chapter examines five of the most important issues of our time that include why racial/ethnic disparities exist in corrections, why a disproportionate number of persons with mental illnesses are in jails and prisons, and what happens when prisoners leave early to reenter the community. We highlight the effectiveness of correctional treatment and of imprisonment itself in deterring crime.

Chapter 14 (“The Future of Criminal Justice: Making Sense of It All”). This chapter is ambitious. As in other chapters in which central concerns of the criminal justice system components are discussed, we selected topics that experts tell us will be areas of concern for years if not decades: global crime, models or theories of justice, policing, judicial decision making, corrections, and juvenile justice. We examine the topical issues and how they are informed by cross-national or comparative criminal justice studies. Our intent in this chapter is to leave readers with a greater appreciation for what they will confront as criminal justice consumers, scholars, and practitioners.

All textbook authors owe debts. No book is simply the work of those writing it. This book is no exception. First, we thank the tens of thousands of students who have sat through our lectures. They inspired us to write a textbook that would hold readers’ attention
and inform them. Second, we thank the external reviewers of the first edition of this text, including Joe M. Brown, Fayetteville State University; Jennifer Christman, Ball State University; Craig Curtis, Bradley University; Brian Donnelly, Rutgers University–New Brunswick; Eric A. Gentes, Rivier University; Patrick Ibe, Albany State University; Joseph Schafer, Southern Illinois University; Rick Seniff, Indiana University–South Bend; James Sobel, Buffalo State University; Cindy Stewart, College of Joseph; and Lecinda Yevchak, Pennsylvania State University.

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Is this a perfect introductory textbook? Probably not. Nevertheless, it is one that we wish we had had access to as students and professors earlier in our careers. It takes the student on an informed journey across several thousand years of societal responses to crimes and criminals. We ground this journey in the most relevant and recent insights we have on these issues. It is our hope that this text serves to stimulate students’ appetite for insights into criminal justice and that they seek even more definitive answers for the questions that we pose—and ones that occur to them as well. Enjoy Introduction to Criminal Justice: The Essentials, and enjoy the search that is about to begin. We are still on that journey. Perhaps we will meet at some juncture.