

## *Murder on the Inside: The True Story of the Deadly Riot at Kingston Penitentiary* by Catherine Fogarty

Jordan House

Volume 113, Number 2, Fall 2021

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1081121ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081121ar>

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

### ISSN

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this review

House, J. (2021). Review of [*Murder on the Inside: The True Story of the Deadly Riot at Kingston Penitentiary* by Catherine Fogarty]. *Ontario History*, 113(2), 258–259. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081121ar>

that preceded and followed it, identifying changes and continuities. I recommend this edited collection to anyone who wants to understand the immediate and long-lasting legacies—both positive and negative—of

the First World War on Canada.

Brittany C. Dunn, PhD Candidate  
Department of History,  
Wilfrid Laurier University

### *Murder on the Inside*

#### *The True Story of the Deadly Riot at Kingston Penitentiary*

by Catherine Fogarty

Windsor, ON: Biblioasis, 2021. Pp. 344. \$24.95. ISBN 1771964014. (Biblioasis.com)

In *Murder on the Inside: The True Story of the Deadly Riot at Kingston Penitentiary*, Catherine Fogarty presents the events and aftermath of the 1971 Kingston Penitentiary (KP) riot—one of the worst in Canadian history—with a true crime gloss. Fogarty is a self-described “storyteller,” television producer, podcaster, and author with a background in social work and she holds a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of King’s College. Fogarty’s approach makes for a compelling narrative and an extremely readable book that is aimed at a popular audience. *Murder on the Inside* will particularly appeal to those with an interest in Canadian crime and corrections, although the book also offers some interesting insights into Canadian politics and policy in the early 1970s.

Unfortunately, the book’s emphasis on narrative contributes to some of its most significant shortcomings as Fogarty’s literary flourishes sometimes come at the expense of factual precision. While, on the whole, the book attempts to remain sympathetic to its main protagonists—prisoners, guards, journalists, and administrators—at times Fogarty indulges in sensationalism. In one example, Fogarty recounts a rumour that two rioters imprisoned for murder had “quartered” their victim by tying chains to his legs and driving their motorcycles in opposite directions (p. 75). This is certainly a shocking

detail that potentially speaks to the character of these particular rioters—however the veracity of this rumour is left unexplored.

The book largely relies on newspaper and magazine articles, along with government documents, for source material. Fogarty’s most significant contribution is in a number of original interviews with guards, including one who had been held hostage, and prisoners who had lived through the riot. These interviews allow for a rich chronicling of events; however, the value of the interviews is somewhat diminished by the book’s sparse citations, which makes it at times difficult to know what source material is being drawn upon. Some information obtained from interviews is cited very generally, but a large amount of the book’s narrative—which is presumably based on interviews and court testimony—is not cited at all. While this undoubtedly contributes to the book’s readability, it has the effect of implying a more objective account of events than is likely warranted.

While not an academic book, the narrative would also have benefited from some engagement with the scholarly literature on Canadian prison riots. This is especially important because some of this work has had considerable influence on the Correctional Service of Canada. For example, two academic analyses of the 1971 KP riot, both by

the sociologist Fred Desroches, were later republished by CSC's Ontario Region as part of an internal "Crisis Management Brochure." Neither article, nor the CSC produced brochure, appears to have been consulted by Fogarty. Other available source material, such as Kingston Penitentiary's inmate run-magazine *Telescope*—which Fogarty briefly discusses—could have been consulted more extensively to provide a richer insight into the lives of federal prisoners.

While the book makes brief references to riots at Kingston Penitentiary in 1932 and 1954, the 1971 riot is largely decontextualized from the turmoil—inside and outside of prisons—of the early seventies. The period of 1968-1972, within which the KP riot occurred, has been described by scholars as an extraordinary moment of prison protest in North America. While Fogarty mentions that the 1971 KP riot occurred just a few months before the notorious Attica prison riot in New York state, other important context is missing. In the months and years immediately preceding the 1971 KP riot, intense focus and criticism had been placed on the American—and at least to some degree—Canadian prison systems. This focus was spurred by years of agitation by prisoners and events such as the 1968 conviction of Black Panther Party leader Huey Newton, the 1970 Folsom prison strike and indictment of Angela Davis, and the killing of Panther and prison activist George Jackson in 1971.

These events were not limited to the United States. The October Crisis of 1970 is only mentioned in passing (and the en-

acting of the War Measures Act during the crisis is not discussed). The jailing of FLQ members in 1971—some of whom, such as Paul Rose, would become prominent prison organizers—is not mentioned. While Fogarty makes reference to a hostage taking at KP (just months before the fatal riot in April), in which the hostage takers demanded asylum in Cuba, there is no significant exploration of the radical political atmosphere that would lead to such a demand.

Similarly, while there is some discussion of the wave of riots in Canadian prisons in the mid-seventies, the book's focus on violent prison protest gives a limited, albeit spectacular, picture of prison organizing at the time. While violent riots and hostage takings were major causes for scrutiny of the federal prison system and would contribute to a Parliamentary Subcommittee report that recommended significant reforms to the federal penitentiary system, the book makes nearly no mention of the much less sensational but critically important non-violent activism and organizing that occurred on both sides of prison walls during the same period.

Despite these deficiencies, *Murder on the Inside* successfully weaves a concise history of Canada's most notorious prison into a compelling story of the 1971 riot and its aftermath and is a valuable contribution to the history of Canada's prisons and the Canadian prison justice movement.

Jordan House  
Brock University

