

City of Order
Crime and Society in Halifax, 1918-35

MICHAEL BOUDREAU



UBCPress · Vancouver · Toronto

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Preface

HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA, experienced dramatic socio-economic changes during the period from 1918 to 1935. The decline of industrial manufacturing meant growing unemployment, poverty, and out-migration. At the same time, the rise of a service-sector economy sheltered the city from complete economic collapse. New forms of technology, culture, and ideas transformed the daily lives of many residents of Halifax. And while many debated the pros and cons of their “modern” world, most did agree on one thing: modernity had corrupted public morality and unleashed an imposing array of social problems, including crime, upon the city. Some even blamed modernity for the crime that beset Halifax between 1918 and 1935. By examining the incidence of crime and the experiences of some criminals in Halifax during these years, I explore the ways in which this perceived rise in crime, the response of the criminal justice system, and the discussion of order shaped one city’s reaction to the challenges of modernity.

Halifax prided itself on being a peaceful, well-ordered city. Crime epitomized the essence of social disorder, and, to counter it, Halifax began to modernize its machinery of order (the police department, courts, and prisons) and to place greater emphasis on the ethos of “crime control.” In the process, the rule of law served as a means of regulating the lives of those men, women, and children who broke or who could potentially break the law. Moreover, it helped to entrench the class, gender, and racial inequalities that characterized this city of order.

Most members of the Halifax community opposed crime and the “criminal element,” attaching little importance to the reform and rehabilitation of criminals. Only juvenile delinquents received any type of reformatory treatment. In the public discussions that arose about crime and criminals, “traditionalist” and “progressive” paradigms emerged in the attempt to

come to grips with the problem of criminality. As the city's law enforcement authorities and concerned citizens battled crime to preserve law and order they constructed an image of the "criminal class." This class, comprised primarily of white, working-class men, provided the police with a convenient target in their efforts to maintain a strict sense of law and order in Halifax.

Women and ethnic minorities who turned to crime also endured harsh opposition from the law and Halifax society. Women, many Halifax citizens believed, could not commit a crime. Paradoxically, however, those who did were perceived as anomalies within society and, hence, were punished severely. Some women attempted to use the criminal law as a source of empowerment, usually against their abusive or neglectful husbands, yet this often met with limited success. Whether as offenders, complainants, or victims, women in Halifax received little equality before the law.

Ethnic minorities bore the brunt of residents' hostility towards crime and disorder. Halifax's dominant white society depicted blacks, Chinese, and "foreigners" as the "other" and relegated them to the margins of civil society. As well, each of these groups was accused of being heavily involved in prostitution and "white slavery," gambling, illegal drugs, and petty crime. In turn, they suffered discrimination at the hands of the criminal justice system.

The "city of order" never fully materialized in interwar Halifax, but those residents who pursued this ideal had a profound impact not only upon the lives of the women, men, and children who were ensnared by the machinery of order but also upon daily life in the city.

Acknowledgments

THE CRIMINAL “UNDERWORLD” of interwar Halifax has fascinated me for perhaps too many years. Along the way it has been my pleasure to incur a number of intellectual debts that I now wish to formally recognize.

Ian McKay at Queen’s University was, and remains, a scholarly mentor extraordinaire and, most of all, a friend.

Special mention is also due to the late William G. Godfrey (Mount Allison University), along with George A. Rawlyk and Shirley Spragge (Queen’s University). Each, in their own unique way, had a profound influence on me and I continue to miss their wisdom and wit.

My sincere thanks goes to Heather J. MacMillan at Library and Archives Canada; David Saint-Ange of the Correctional Service of Canada Museum (Kingston); Sergeant Don Young of the Halifax Police Museum Archives; Donna Matheson of the Atlantic Institute of Criminology; and the reference staffs of the law library at Queen’s University, Dalhousie University Archives and Special Collections, the Legislative Library of Nova Scotia, and, especially, Nova Scotia Archives (NSA). Without their assistance the task of locating and deciphering the mound of archival and statistical material associated with this project would have been nearly impossible. Indeed, Barry Cahill (formally of NSA), John MacLeod, Philip Hartling, and Lois Yorke at NSA were extremely helpful in this regard.

A number of friends lent me a much needed helping hand. At the University of New Brunswick (Saint John) and the University of Ottawa, Greg Marquis and Constance Backhouse, respectively, read the entire manuscript and offered feedback that was vital to improving it. I am also grateful to the UBC Press readers whose incisive comments helped to make this a better book. Jim Morrison (Saint Mary’s University), gave me the transcripts from the interviews with two Halifax police officers: these

were invaluable sources. At Dalhousie University, Shirley Tillotson discussed with me the history of early twentieth-century Halifax and gave me crucial research leads, as did Suzanne Morton (McGill University). At the Dalhousie Schulich School of Law, Philip Girard helped me unravel the mysteries of the criminal law and the nuances of Canadian legal history; at Acadia University, Barry Moody opened up his files for my perusal; at the University of British Columbia, Tamara Myers enlightened me about the history of policewomen; and at the University of Toronto, Jim Phillips was one of the first scholars to pique my interest in criminal justice history. All of this fine scholarly assistance notwithstanding, I take full responsibility for my work and for whatever “crimes” I may inadvertently have committed.

Randy Schmidt and Holly Keller at UBC Press performed yeoman service in bringing this book to fruition, and Wes Pue, general editor of the Law and Society Series, was unwavering in his support of both myself and this book.

My sincere thanks to *Acadiensis* for allowing me to use, in chapters 2 and 4, some of the material from a previously published article.

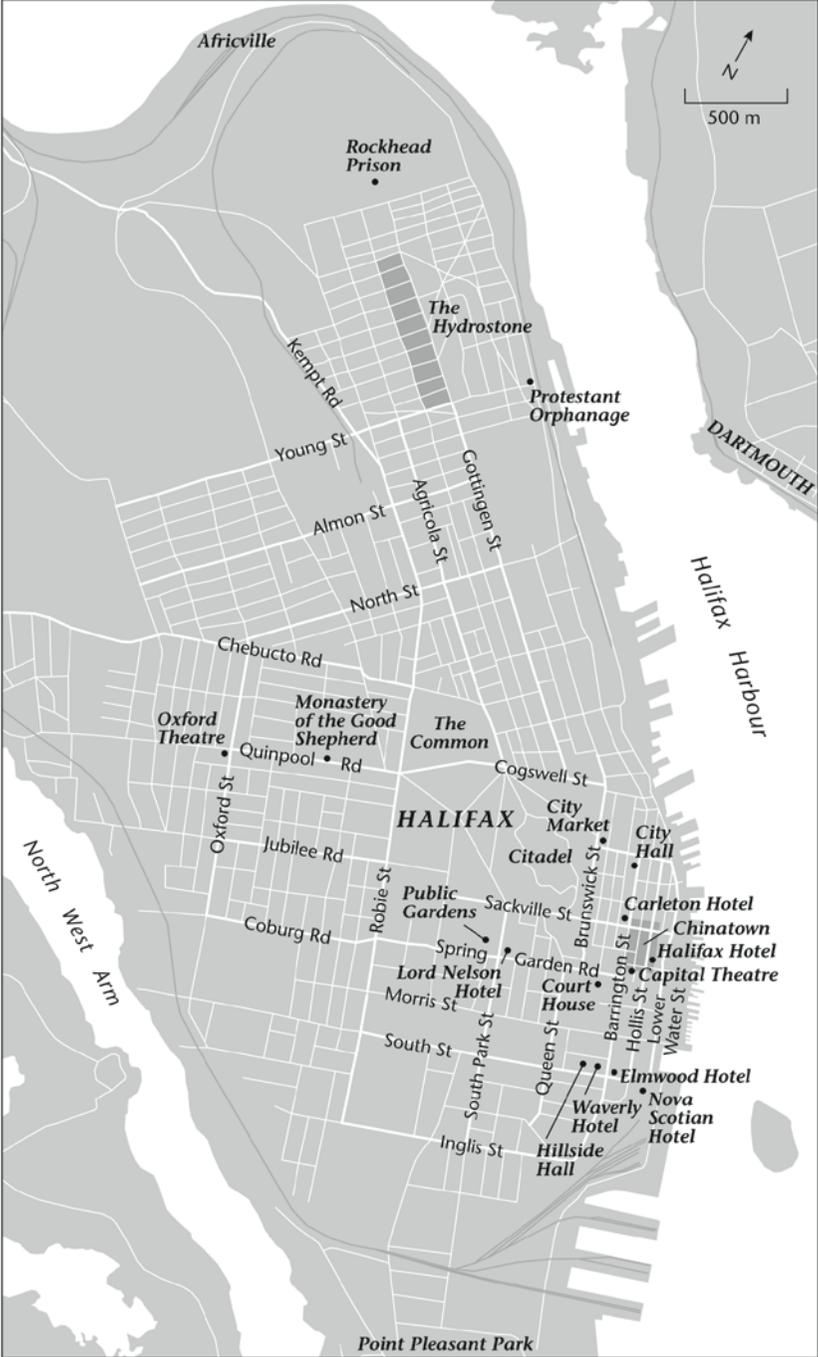
At the University of New Brunswick, Bill Parenteau (former editor of *Acadiensis*), Marg Conrad, Linda Kealey, and Greg Kealey have been terrific supporters since my arrival in Fredericton.

I wish to thank St. Thomas University for granting me the McCain Award, which gave me the valuable time that I needed to put the finishing touches on the manuscript. The Senate Research Committee at St. Thomas University also provided generous support to help defray the cost of the index.

Dale Dasset was very helpful in the preparation of the manuscript.

Also at St. Thomas University a number of superb scholars have become close friends and sources of inspiration: Rusty Bitterman, Michael Dawson, Catherine Gidney, Gayle MacDonald, Jean Sauvageau, Peter Toner, Tony Tremblay, and Shaunda Wood.

Finally, words alone cannot convey what Bonnie Huskins has meant to me and to this book, nor can they adequately express my thanks to her; hopefully, my enduring love will suffice. And while this book is not dedicated to Bonnie per se, the spirit of Edna and Ida, to whom it *is* dedicated, lives on in her.



Halifax, ca. 1930

City of Order

Halifax Blues

Junked cars bunch, hunch like rats; laundry,
Lynched, dangles from clotheslines; streetlamps sputter,
Gutter, blow out; gross, bloated cops
Awake and pummel Lysol-scented drunks,
While God grins at scabbed girls who scour the streets
To pass pestilence to legislators.
The harbour crimps like a bent, black cripple;
It limps, drops dead on rocks: each wave's a crutch
That's pitilessly kicked aside. Above,
Grim gulls beat night with wings that beat back rain.
I drag poems from the water's muffled black.
They chomp, wriggle, and thrash on Love's bloody,
Two-pronged hook. I slap them, writhing still,
On paper, and cry beautiful darkness –
The baroque scream of a feeling. Hurt crows
Caw my sorrow better than a thousand white
Doves. I skulk beneath these fainting streetlamps
To disturb taverns, set cops ill at ease.

– George Elliott Clarke, *Lush Dreams, Blue Exile* (1994)

INTRODUCTION

Crime, the Rule of Law, and Society

THE GUNSHOT THAT eventually killed Leslie A. Corkum shattered the silence of what had otherwise been a calm Halloween evening in Halifax in 1922. Corkum, age twenty-six, owned a grocery store on Spring Garden Road in a residential area of the city. As Corkum busily prepared to close up his shop shortly after 11:00 PM, the murderer entered the premises and instructed him to put up his hands. When Corkum refused to do so, thinking the whole affair was simply a hoax (he reportedly said to the bandit, “You are only joking aren’t you?”), the gunman shot him in the abdomen, plundered the cash register, and fled into the darkness. Rushed to the Victoria General Hospital for treatment, Corkum died there two days later.¹ Shock and indignation surfaced in the wake of this shooting. A local paper called it one of the “most daring robberies that has ever taken place in the history of this city.”² Another labelled it a “particularly bold and dastardly” crime that should “bring the authorities sharply to their sense of responsibility as the custodians of law and order in the community.”³ The *Morning Chronicle* then called upon Mayor John Murphy to immediately implement the measures necessary to apprehend the person who had committed this “truly alarming” deed.⁴ For his part, the mayor, underlining the extent to which the hold-up was something unprecedented, unsettling, and unconventional – “modern,” in short – issued a statement that attempted to offer reassurance to the citizens of Halifax: “An occurrence such as this is new to Halifax. There need be no question in the minds of our citizens as to the steps which have been taken to trail down the perpetrator ... It is only necessary to say nothing is being left undone by the police department to bring the criminal to justice.”⁵ Even the Attorney General’s Office, in an attempt to solve the case, offered a \$500 reward for any information leading to the capture of Corkum’s

assailant.⁶ Many in the community wanted this crime solved quickly and a sense of order restored to Halifax.

Sensitive to this public pressure and well aware of its duty to combat crime and protect the public, the Halifax Police Department launched a sweeping investigation. Every available officer and detective took part in gathering evidence, questioning possible witnesses, and locating suspects. The chief of police, Frank Hanrahan, personally supervised the case. He assured concerned citizens: "Every possible clue is being run down and we are leaving nothing undone to capture the man."⁷ Taking into consideration the fact that the robbery had occurred in a populated district and a well-lit store, the police believed the man they sought either had to be a "most desperate character or ... completely insane."⁸ With this as their guiding assumption, the police initiated a search for the criminal. Initially, the police dragnet failed to haul in the man they wanted. The day after the incident, Chief Detective Kennedy arrested Roland Finlay of Dartmouth, Halifax's twin city across the harbour, on suspicion. Finlay vaguely fit the description Corkum had given to police before he died, and since Finlay had been carrying a loaded gun and could not give a satisfactory account of his actions on the night in question, Kennedy felt justified in detaining him.⁹ As the police questioned Finlay, the city continued to exude a feeling of uneasiness over the whole affair. "Probably never before in its history was the city so aroused over a crime," the *Morning Chronicle* declared: "In every quarter of the city yesterday, by citizens of every walk of life, was there the demand that the Police and the authorities spare not the slightest means in their power to run to earth the desperado guilty of Tuesday night's outrage." Although Corkum had been the victim, the *Chronicle* strongly felt that the crime itself affected the entire city, which had to "be protected at all costs."¹⁰ No doubt this uneasy feeling did not subside when, due to insufficient evidence, the police released Finlay after a brief interrogation and fined him twenty dollars for carrying a loaded revolver.¹¹

Contrary to public demands, the Halifax police did not bring a speedy end to this case. Despite rounding up a number of suspicious characters, the "Bold Gunman," as the press dubbed him, continued to elude law enforcement officials.¹² Not until January 1923 did the police announce that they had captured and charged Allister Munroe with the shooting death of Leslie Corkum as well as with a series of store robberies throughout the city.¹³ Munroe had a reputation as a "bad actor." During their search of Munroe's flat, the police had found a coat allegedly worn by the murderer and a thirty-eight calibre revolver. Now the wheels of justice could begin

to turn to guarantee that Munroe answered for his crime.¹⁴ On the surface this appears to be nothing more than an unfortunate, but routine, murder for the Halifax police. Yet, Leslie Corkum's murder exposed the city's vulnerability to crime. For many citizens this shooting represented another flagrant violation of law and order. Moreover, it served as a reminder that lawlessness continued to be an uncomfortable facet of life in Halifax. The Corkum murder, elevated to a *cause célèbre* in the media, also came to symbolize the disorder and moral chaos of modernity itself. Throughout the 1918-35 period, legal authorities, and much of middle-class society in Halifax, engaged in a vigilant pursuit of law and order. They wanted to create a "city of order" in the midst of the storms of modernity that gripped the city during these years. The rule of law and the justice system in Halifax treated the city's "criminal class" (comprised mainly of men), along with the population in general, differently according to their class, gender, and ethnicity. At the same time, however, "criminals" did have one common image in the minds of Halifax's law-abiding citizenry: they were seen as a menace to the city's social order. In her study of sexual crimes in Ontario, Karen Dubinsky cogently argues that crime affected not only the criminals and victims but also the reputation, well-being, and prosperity of the entire community.¹⁵ This was certainly the case for Halifax. From 1918 to 1935, the city's criminal justice system, which underwent a process of modernization, sought to control criminal activity. The implementation of the criminal law was thus dictated in part by those who deemed law and order to be essential to social stability and harmony.

Most residents took pride in Halifax as being a quiet, well-ordered city. As one 1927 article in the *Halifax Chronicle* put it, Halifax "is essentially a conservative city. It has been in business now for more than 175 years and is more or less immune to the hysteria which afflicts younger communities. Its people are steady, solid and reliable ... [and] ... the City of Halifax is ... on a sounder footing than many other cities of Canada that appear to be more flourishing."¹⁶

Examples of disrespect for law and order, "so much to be deplored," that detracted from the city's reputation did admittedly exist. Nevertheless, as one source notes: "these we are bound to believe were merely episodes and not characteristic occurrences in the life of the community."¹⁷ The same belief in the tranquillity of Halifax held true for Nova Scotia in general. "From its earliest days," one writer asserts, "Nova Scotia has had respect for law and order and although there may be times and

happenings which give cause for concern, the exemplary conduct of the thousands of people who [reside in the province] ... is an earnest [example] that Nova Scotians are maintaining the old reputation of their province.”¹⁸ That “old reputation” involved a devout adherence to law and order. A 1929 editorial proudly said of Nova Scotia: “This Province, a Province of British laws, customs and traditions, has long prided itself on its law and order. Order is heaven’s first law and no state can expect to accomplish very much unless there is a wholesome respect for law. Anything which tends to lawlessness aims a blow at the heart of the state.”¹⁹ In agreeing with this statement, many Halifax residents recognized that crime did occur but felt confident that law and order would ultimately prevail. Chief of Police Frank Hanrahan echoed this belief at the beginning of 1923 as part of his department’s New Year’s resolution to the city. “The police department,” Hanrahan declared, “[will] preserve the King’s peace in the city ... run down lawbreakers and keep this city as it is today, one of the most peaceful and secure in the dominion of Canada.”²⁰ Hanrahan’s reference to the “King’s peace” highlights the city’s dedication to social order and to a “legal environment” within which the state and the criminal justice system strove to control crime.²¹

A year after Hanrahan’s decree, the *Halifax Herald* noted with pride that Halifax was poised to snatch the mantle of “Good” away from Toronto. Since the police had arrested only one drunkard between Christmas Eve and Christmas night, Halifax, the paper believed, could claim the title “Halifax the Good.”²² Yet this confidence in the rule of order, and the willingness to over-read one piece of evidence, suggests the naivety of many citizens regarding the presence of crime in their city. As the *Halifax Herald* remarked four years earlier, following a 1920 daylight attack on a man by a “desperado,” general disbelief greeted such events because of the feeling that they rarely occurred. However, as the article lamented, order and safety were not keeping pace with the growth of the city: “In our great regard for our industrial and commercial development and progress, we have not made the same progress in public order and the observance of it as we have in material progress.” The paper went on to scold the inhabitants of Halifax for their ignorance of such violence, announcing that the time had come to: “DEPRECATE our smug, complacent attitudes to our development in regard for public order and in the means of protection which safeguard the security of our citizens.” The city could not “grow greatly materially” while “neglect[ing] the means of public order

and decency.” The *Herald* felt that Halifax was in danger of losing its “civic soul.”²³

As Leslie Corkum’s killing pointed out to most Halifax residents, order did not occur naturally; rather, a “city of order” had to be constructed and reconstructed on a daily basis. Halifax’s citizens found themselves in a rapidly changing city that was becoming more and more modern. They emphasized building a city of order to limit the impact of modernity. To this end, from 1918 to 1935, a campaign arose in Halifax to modernize the city’s criminal justice system, or machinery of order (particularly the police department, criminal courts, and penal system), to meet the challenges posed by crime. These challenges were firmly associated with modernity. Characterized by capitalist production and urbanization, modernity made much of North American society a world of “paradox and contradiction.”²⁴ In this specific context, the perception surfaced that the substance of daily life had altered completely. People no longer automatically knew their neighbours or spoke their language; they could not assume a consensus on religion or morality; they lived to a large extent among strangers and worked in impersonal institutions; they shopped in new, massive stores and were influenced by the new arts of the radio broadcaster and the advertiser; and they felt themselves to be part of a society in which the safety of neither person nor property could be assured. Above all, the people of Halifax lived at a time when their world seemed to be changing more quickly than their ability to understand it. The years from 1918 to 1935 proved to be difficult ones, both socially and economically, for Halifax. The city underwent a dramatic and disruptive transformation. Modernity uprooted many of the values and meanings that had been woven into the fabric of Halifax society. The presumption that modernity would lead to the formation of a happier and more secure society did not, in the minds of several contemporaries, become a reality. The idea of a “traditional community” founded upon trust and security seemed to crumble. In its wake came feelings of uncertainty and, for some at least, dread of the social environment.²⁵ It was through this lens of modernity that many Halifax residents viewed crime. Offences such as the use and sale of drugs (notably opium) and shoplifting could be interpreted as manifestations of a loosening of public morals and a weakening of respect for lawful authority. Similarly, crimes with which Halifax had had long experience, such as prostitution, vagrancy, gambling, and murder, were now characterized as peculiarly “modern.”

The response to modernity, like the experience itself, was complex. On the one hand, in the 1920s, many people in Halifax undoubtedly welcomed modernity with enthusiasm. They flocked to modern department stores, attended the cinema, openly discussed sexuality, and felt themselves to be citizens of the world. When it came to the criminal justice system, some of them readily translated the progressive insights of sociology and the new science of criminology – that crime was socially constructed and that its eradication could be achieved through social planning and social reform – into plans to modernize the entire legal framework. At the same time, however, most members of Halifax society, often the same ones who enthusiastically embraced modernity, drew back from what they thought were its consequences. In response to largely media-manufactured “crime waves,” they demanded a more punitive and aggressive course of action to defeat the “criminal class,” and they usually found a convenient scapegoat in the figure of the “deviant alien.” Despite signs of progressive change in this period, evident in the categorization and treatment of juveniles and in a mounting desire to reform prisons, a more basic theme was that of a continuous struggle to uphold “British justice” as the city of order’s primary bulwark against the moral and social anarchy unleashed by modernity. Across the landscape of crime, criminal justice, and the discourses generated around them, inertia, traditionalism, and even anti-modernism predominate over any drive for progressive change.

According to Charles Taylor, once a society “no longer has a structure, once social arrangements and modes of actions are no longer grounded in the order of things or the will of God, they are in a sense up for grabs.”²⁶ Halifax’s uneasy adjustment from a manufacturing-based economy to one dependent upon the service sector and tourism meant further unemployment, out-migration, and a widening of the gap between rich and poor. It was within this setting that the City of Halifax tried to deal with crime. In some ways modernity made the problem of crime seem more acute than it had been. Indeed, in the eyes of some, Halifax appeared to be on the brink of chaos. Although twentieth-century Halifax was generally a much more orderly city than was nineteenth-century Halifax, the perception was otherwise. To prevent lawlessness and the undermining of social order, most members of the local community actively sought to maintain order. In the process, the rule of law became an important mechanism for criminal justice officials, who undertook a concerted, if not entirely successful, effort to restructure Halifax’s patterns of security and surveillance through placing greater emphasis upon “crime control.”

By modernizing the city's forces of law and order, many hoped, Halifax would be in a position to cope with, and possibly eradicate, crime.²⁷

A social history of crime provides a unique vantage point from which to view the complexities and contradictions of interwar society in Halifax. People lived their lives under the rule of law. Therefore, a study of the history of crime and the legal system that tried to control it will provide some insight into the formation and pattern of individual experience. For many in Halifax, crime came to epitomize the disorder that they felt riddled Nova Scotia's capital. Crime and the social disorder that it produced challenged accepted authority and thus threatened to undermine the socio-economic status quo. Consequently, as the example of Halifax shows, law enforcement and judicial authorities responded to criminal activity by pursuing the ultimate goal of restoring order. The state's reaction to crime is couched in the rhetoric of law and order and the notion of the "common good." This notion forms part of the discourse of order, which requires people to obey the law and to respect the "established order."²⁸ The ongoing pursuit of law and order by the state, and by those citizens most alarmed by the incidence of crime, is my overarching theme. I choose to examine crime and society in Halifax between the years of 1918 and 1935 for two reasons: (1) Halifax experienced a series of socio-economic changes during these years that heightened many residents' anxiety over crime; and (2) in response to the perceived threat that crime and criminals posed to social order, efforts were made during these years to improve how the criminal justice system dealt with the men, women, and children who could and did commit crimes.

Scholars have yet to reach a consensus regarding the nature and meaning of crime. Noted American law professor Lawrence M. Friedman contends that crime is a legal concept. What renders some forms of conduct criminal and others not "is the fact that some, but not others are against the law." Friedman thus concludes that crimes can be defined as "forbidden acts" that are susceptible to both a legal and a social judgment from the courts and society in general.²⁹ In Halifax, "forbidden acts" often met with a swift and sometimes harsh response from the criminal justice system in the hope that this would curb the outbreak of crime. To highlight this fact, I provide a multi-dimensional portrait of crime and society in interwar Halifax. It includes not only the incidence of crime but also the experiences of some criminals and the reaction to criminality on the part of the police, the criminal justice system, the law, and civil society. David Sugarman describes the law, whether civil or criminal, as "part of society

and economy: it is a social, intellectual, and economic, as well as legal institution.³⁰ Indeed, the law exists at nearly all levels of society. The rule of law is a framework of authority to which everyone is bound to adhere. In conjunction with the state, the law maintains a social order characterized by domination and opposition.³¹ Opposition to the law, primarily in the form of crime, is an important basis of social relations. Whether banded together as an unruly mob or acting on their own as “primitive rebels,” men, women, and children have long confronted the law and legal authority. It is this process of committing crimes and restoring order that allows the law to become “an arena for class struggle, within which alternative notions of law [are] fought out.” The law thus serves as a way for people to mediate their social and ideological conflicts.³² What changes, however, is the nature of the crimes and the context within which law and order is threatened and maintained.

In Halifax from 1918 to 1935 modernity furnished the backdrop for the pursuit of order and the battle against crime. Through the criminal law, which is a particular manifestation of the “rule of law,” society seeks to affirm and to impose an ideal of “law and order.” The criminal justice system dispenses a form of “selective terror” in order to control dangerous behaviour, regulate morality, and keep social order.³³ As Eric Colvin argues, the “rule of law” refers to the regulation of the social order by the legal order.³⁴ However, the power wielded by the rule of law is not absolute; rather, it rests upon the appearance, not the reality, of “equality before the law.” By appearing to be just and to be removed from gross manipulation, the rule of law commands voluntary compliance from most sectors of civil society.³⁵ The ideal of the rule of law legitimizes the pursuit of actual law and order. Early twentieth-century civil society in Canada required order and stability to function without undue crisis. This order and stability was partly attained through the operation of the justice system and the rule of law, with its theoretical premise of equal treatment for all who come before it. Yet such formal judicial equality also at times perpetuated existing socio-economic inequalities and unequal class, gender, and ethnic relations.³⁶ It is this contradiction in the rule of law that a study of crime in interwar Halifax reveals. Moreover, the rule of law and the entire machinery of order predicated upon it are two of the central constraints imposed by the state upon civil society. These legal constraints help to construct humans as abstract individuals with formal political and legal rights.³⁷ The ability of the law and the state to individualize people and to define who is a “criminal,” thereby projecting the

artificial notion of equality throughout society, is of fundamental importance.³⁸ The “power to define” what is legal or illegal behaviour is a key component of the rule of law’s legitimacy, allowing it to determine the parameters of social acceptance under the rubric of law and order.³⁹ Much of this comes to light as I describe how, in its efforts to enforce law and order, the machinery of order in Halifax perceived and dealt with crime and criminals.

Legal and criminal justice history has established a firm niche within Canadian historiography and law and society studies generally. In a 1992 article Greg Marquis considers legal history to be “one of the most neglected branches of social history in Canada.”⁴⁰ However, with the publication of *Law, Society, and the State: Essays in Modern Legal History*, legal history “has ... come of age.”⁴¹ Previously, legal history was characterized by somewhat narrowly focused examinations of the law, its development, and the impact that it had upon specific individuals, institutions, or society generally.⁴² This concentration, however, tends to ignore the large socio-economic milieu that impinges upon the creation and interpretation of the law. The field of legal history is now marked, in the view of Louis A. Knafla and Susan W.S. Binnie, by an interest in how law and the state are informed by ethnicity, gender, class, and culture. Despite these advances, some legal historians still view crime as an incidental element of the law and have paid it little attention.⁴³ Yet an appreciation of the world of crime is crucial to an understanding of the way in which the law operates in Canadian society. Similarly, whereas legal history at times minimizes the importance of crime, criminal justice history tries to illustrate its centrality to the definition and functioning of the law. Such themes as criminality, state formation, punishment and incarceration, and police and law enforcement form the contours of this branch of social history.

A brief survey of some of the key studies of crime and society reveals the diversity, along with the strengths and weaknesses, of criminal justice history.⁴⁴ The fifth volume in the series *Essays in the History of Canadian Law*, subtitled *Crime and Criminal Justice* and edited by Jim Phillips, Tina Loo, and Susan Lewthwaite, encapsulates many of the current approaches to crime and criminal justice. The book’s four sections grapple with questions of ethnicity, gender, state authority, and prisons in relation to the criminal law. Most important, the book underscore how the law detrimentally affected the lives of the socially marginalized (e.g., ethnic minorities and women), while offering a limited source of empowerment to some.⁴⁵ Historically, the state has played a central role in the function of

the criminal law. Although the rule of law garnered public respect, each contributor to the section entitled “Criminal Justice Institutions and State Authority” notes that this respect did not always trickle down to every segment of society. Thus, what constituted the “law” and “crime” for legal officials often did not do so for members of a specific community. Crime and criminal justice, this section concludes, remained caught up in the interplay of social values and structures.⁴⁶ Prisons and reformatories represented a visible reminder of the institutional presence of the state. The chapters in the section entitled “Canadian Prisons in the Nineteenth Century” consider the state’s initiatives with regard to reforming male and female prisoners and, hence, preventing crime. In spite of the rhetoric proclaiming their ability to turn inmates into productive members of society, penal institutions failed to solve the problems of crime and rehabilitation. Throughout the nineteenth century, then, punishment displaced rehabilitation in the treatment of convicted offenders.⁴⁷ Similar conclusions may be found in much of the literature on prisons and penal reform in Canada.⁴⁸ Missing from Phillips et al. is the history of Canadian policing. Initially, police historiography turned to institutional examinations of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and local forces to depict the role played by the police in the administration of justice. From here scholars branched out to cover policewomen, the policing of strikes, the involvement of the police in settling domestic disputes, and police treatment of minorities.⁴⁹ The fact that the police are often empowered to provide working definitions of what counts as a crime in daily life means that to overlook them would be to overlook central players in the struggle over order and disorder in modern society.⁵⁰

The only chronological history of crime in Canada is D. Owen Carrigan’s *Crime and Punishment in Canada: A History*. In order to sustain his central contention that the long-standing perception of Canada as a relatively crime-free society is suspect, Carrigan traces the history of crime from the colonial era to roughly 1990.⁵¹ However, he does not delve into the effects of class, gender, and ethnicity on conviction rates and the treatment offenders received at the hands of the criminal justice system. Although *Crime and Punishment in Canada* is an excellent encyclopaedic reference on crime in Canada, its failure to address some of the fundamental questions concerning the nature of crime and the law, and the social and economic influences on their development, weakens its effectiveness and leaves the study of crime in Canada open to further research.⁵²

Some historians use the familiar case studies approach to uncovering the world of crime. Usually, these works focus on large cities or towns. The study of urban crime provides a way of uncovering the socio-economic context of Canada's cities. In addition, a community-based model "offers the appropriate scale for blending law and society."⁵³ Crime, as John W. Fierheller notes, may be utilized as an indicator of social and economic dislocation.⁵⁴ A concentration on one city, rather than on several metropolises, also allows for more definitive conclusions to be drawn regarding the incidence of crime and its impact on the administration of justice and the community itself.⁵⁵ James Huzel's statistical evaluation of the crime rate in Vancouver during the Depression is one example of this. Huzel illustrates that the onset of this economic crisis contributed to an increase in both the rate and the volume of total property crime. According to Huzel, this surge in property-related crimes in Vancouver was closely connected to the growing poverty and destitution of the 1930s.⁵⁶ Huzel's reliance on statistics, while allowing for a detailed description of the presence of crime in Vancouver, does not allow for a complete picture of criminality in this city. The criminals themselves, and the response of the police and the general public to their actions, are not featured in his article. Consequently, few conclusions can be drawn regarding how Vancouver reacted to and dealt with crime in this period.⁵⁷

André Cellard and John C. Weaver provide more nuanced interpretations of crime in urban Canada. Cellard's work on Hull, Quebec, in the twentieth century combines crime statistics and local press coverage of criminal activity. In Cellard's view, Quebec's liberal attitude towards alcohol and Hull's status as a "*ville frontalière*" affected both the crime rate and the actions taken by criminal justice authorities to overcome it.⁵⁸ Turning to Hamilton, Ontario, John C. Weaver offers a sweeping treatise on crime from 1816 to 1970. According to Weaver: "the pursuit of order and justice has ... promoted change in the institutions dealing with disorder and crime."⁵⁹ In this sense, crime has had a direct effect on the shape of daily life in Canada's cities. Weaver's work is also important because it considers the institutional and social dimensions of crime and punishment. It charts the modernization of Hamilton's mechanisms of law enforcement, from the officer on the beat to the structure of the courts. Each of these combined to make up an increasingly bureaucratic "web of power" that helped to mediate social relations in Hamilton. In addition, Weaver tries to unearth the underlying values that affected law

and order in this city. These values, he argues, “have underscored peculiarities about the communities in which they have functioned.”⁶⁰

Little has been written on the history of crime in twentieth-century Halifax. Some of the material that has appeared falls into the category of popular history.⁶¹ However, Peter McGahan’s overview of crime in Halifax and Saint John, and in the Maritimes generally, deals with the subject in a more scholarly fashion. Relying heavily upon official crime statistics, McGahan outlines the categories of offences committed, arrest and conviction rates, and the profiles of some offenders. While not subjecting his data to close scrutiny, McGahan does conclude that socio-economic underdevelopment in the Maritimes explains the relative stability in the region’s crime patterns from the late 1880s to the mid-1900s.⁶² McGahan’s conclusions, while somewhat generalized, do lay some groundwork for a more focused treatment of crime in these two cities. Much of the academic literature on crime in Halifax concentrates on the nineteenth century. Judith Fingard’s *The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax* is the most comprehensive assessment of crime and the law in this period. Tracing the experiences of a core group of recidivists, Fingard depicts the harsh social environment of this “underclass” and the treatment they received from local law enforcement authorities and social reform organizations. Moreover, in following the activities of these individuals, Fingard underscores the prevailing impression of orderliness and concern for the quality of urban life that characterized Victorian Halifax.⁶³ The challenge posed to the established order by the actions of Halifax’s criminal underclass raised the ire of the city’s elite and invoked a host of responses whose purpose was to combat deviant behaviour. This dedication to order continued into the twentieth century and profoundly influenced the city’s attitudes towards crime and its handling of criminals.

Other accounts of crime in Halifax during the nineteenth century also discuss the criminality of the underclass. Victorian Halifax, B. Jane Price shows, possessed a female criminal class, a caste of women who repeatedly came before the courts for committing petty offences. Many of these women lived in poverty, which, as Price suggests, forced some into a life of crime.⁶⁴ Several members of Halifax’s middle class viewed the poor and vagrants as threats to social and moral discipline and order. Jim Phillips’ work on vagrancy laws and female criminals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Halifax shows how the criminal justice system tried to curb these chronic problems. Most of those accused of being “vagrants”

and criminals came from the ranks of the unemployed and the marginal poor who turned to crime as a means of economic survival. The jailing of vagrants and female criminals, designed to instil in the “lower orders” bourgeois notions of “sobriety, industry, and respectability,” served as part of a broader process of social control.⁶⁵ This helped to ensure that the law was perceived not only as a harsh (yet necessary) instrument of coercion but also as a legitimate social institution that could display both mercy and impartiality.⁶⁶

The theme of imposing law and order for the sake of social stability in Halifax arises again in the early part of the twentieth century and forms the central topic of this book. I discuss the social construction of criminality, in addition to the class, gender, and ethnic dimensions of crime in Halifax. I also assess the response of the city’s machinery of order to criminal activity. As well, I examine the media’s and the public’s views of crime and of the persons who did, or who could, break the law. The years between 1918 and 1935 were a crucial period in Halifax’s socio-economic development and, as such, an intriguing time within which to study crime. This was a time that saw the city plunged into a whirlwind of change and social crisis. Just as soon as Halifax had begun to recover from the effects of the First World War and the devastating explosion of 1917, it confronted an economic collapse in the 1920s, marked by massive factory closures. Unemployment, poverty, and general social dislocation epitomized this period. In these uncertain times, Halifax dealt with what appeared to be a resurgent wave of crime. To overcome the threat that crime represented to public safety and order, the city tried to improve and modernize all of the components of its criminal justice system. The interval between 1930 and 1935, highlighted by the release in 1933 of the *Report of the Royal Commission Concerning Jails* in Nova Scotia signified widespread public disquiet over the measures taken to safeguard the so-called city of order. The royal commission also renewed calls for penal reform and sparked yet another attempt in Halifax to solve the vexing problem of crime and criminal rehabilitation. It is here that one can detect Halifax’s movement towards more progressive tactics in its efforts to overcome what some considered to be serious inadequacies in the state’s approach to crime and punishment. While the pervasive demand for law and order did not subside in Halifax between 1918 and 1935, the city’s strategies for controlling crime did change, however unevenly, to satisfy the demand for order.

Crime and the experience of modernity were closely intertwined in Halifax. Contemporaries often articulated their anxieties about the pace of social and cultural change in the context of numerous “crimes” and “crime waves” confronted in the 1920s and early 1930s. I define “crime” as any event that contravenes the laws of Canada (principally those contained in the Criminal Code) and that was perceived to do so by those entrusted with the power to uphold and enforce the rule of law. I am not unduly preoccupied by some of the familiar doubts expressed about the objectivity of crime statistics, such as those proceeding from the accurate view that what is a crime in one period may not be a crime in another period. The generally accepted meaning of “murder” or “armed robbery” did not undergo any significant changes from 1918 to 1935. However, this is not to say that crime statistics can simply be taken at face value. Clearly, to the degree that they help to draw a general picture of crime and to deflate unduly alarmist notions of Halifax as a uniquely offence-prone city experiencing an unprecedented wave of crime, criminal statistics reflect not only the “realities” of crime but also the efficiency with which crime was detected and prosecuted. They are, nevertheless, to be taken with many grains of salt, and I only use them (primarily in Chapter 1) to furnish a general impression of the extent of crime in Halifax, especially when considered within the overall Canadian context.

In order to explore the world of crime and criminals in interwar Halifax, I divide this book into six chapters. Chapter 1 provides an outline of the socio-economic milieu of Halifax and a statistical overview of crime in the city. Chapter 2 offers a detailed examination of the city’s machinery of order, the changes it underwent, and how it worked to sustain social order. Chapter 3 examines the social perceptions of crime and criminals in Halifax. In their attempts to deal with the turmoil wrought by modernity, a core group of Halifax’s politicians, judges, lawyers, social reform activists, and journalists expressed their ideas about what caused crime, who was a criminal, and what society should do to resolve the issue of crime. Their commentaries offer a great deal of insight into the nature of Halifax society between 1918 and 1935.

Chapter 4 examines the types of crimes committed in Halifax and also gives a brief profile of the city’s “criminal class,” assessing how the justice system and the community perceived and treated these individuals. Those who apparently belonged to this coterie of criminals were closely monitored by the police. This chapter also discusses juvenile delinquents.

Youthful law-breakers proved to be a tremendous source of consternation for Halifax's juvenile justice system and the city in general. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the two groups that generated the most concern over crime and the spread of vice and immorality: women and ethnic minorities. Chapter 5 comments on the perceptions of women in Halifax generally and female criminals specifically, and it shows how the machinery of order dealt with them. Moreover, it provides an explanation not only of how women were victimized by crime but also of how they attempted to use the law as a source of empowerment. It is clear that the criminal justice system in Halifax did its part to reinforce gender ideals and inequalities.

Perhaps more so than any other member of the criminal element in Halifax, ethnic minorities, especially blacks, Chinese, and "foreigners" bore the stigma of being potential threats to law and order. Chapter 6 thus focuses on the criminal activity, both real and imagined, associated with these ethnic communities. This segment of Halifax's criminal underworld encountered the harshest public rebuke and the heaviest discrimination from the machinery of order. By raising the spectre of racial identity, local authorities and those concerned with preserving the socio-economic status quo constructed these alleged criminals as the "other." This relegated them to the margins of society and allowed the criminal justice system to dispense "justice" as it saw fit. The struggle for a state of law and order in Halifax – this modern city of order – can thus be seen as a force affecting the city's people in many powerful and often contradictory ways.

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Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Boudreau, Michael S. (Michael Scott), 1967-

City of order [electronic resource]: crime and society in Halifax, 1918-35 /
Michael Boudreau.

(Law and society, ISSN 1496-4953)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Electronic monograph issued in multiple formats.

Also issued in print format.

ISBN 978-0-7748-2206-0 (PDF). – ISBN 978-0-7748-2207-7 (EPUB)

1. Crime – Nova Scotia – Halifax – History – 20th century. 2. Criminal justice, Administration of – Nova Scotia – Halifax – History – 20th century. 3. Sociological jurisprudence – Nova Scotia – Halifax – History – 20th century. 4. Halifax (N.S.) – Social conditions – 20th century. I. Title. II. Series: Law and society series (Vancouver, B.C.)

HV6810.H33B69 2012

364.9716'22509041

C2012-901447-8

Canada

UBC Press gratefully acknowledges the financial support for our publishing program of the Government of Canada (through the Canada Book Fund), the Canada Council for the Arts, and the British Columbia Arts Council.

This book has been published with the help of a grant from the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, through the Aid to Scholarly Publications Program, using funds provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

UBC Press

The University of British Columbia

2029 West Mall

Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2

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