

## **Crime and Punishment: Evolving Issues in Canadian Criminal Law**

**Tuesday, October 21 to December 9, 2025**

**On Zoom**

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**Presenter: Sandra Kingston, Former Crown Attorney**

**Course Overview:** This course delves into the Canadian criminal justice system. Starting with an analysis of gun culture, it covers homicide investigations, gang origins, public inquiries and the role of Crown Attorneys. Kingston, a seasoned prosecutor, shares insights into notable cases, and guest speakers contribute diverse perspectives. The course spans topics like policing, the death penalty, wrongful convictions, solitary confinement, and the evolving landscape of medical assistance in dying and will provide a thorough understanding of key legal and societal issues in Canada's criminal justice system.

**Tuesday, October 21: All About Guns: Gun Culture in Canada**

**Speaker Sandy Kingston: Crown Counsel**

Why is there an increase of gun violence on our streets? Are we becoming more like the Americans? Are random shootings, and the attendant injuries and death, becoming as mainstream in Canada as the U.S.? This lecture will look at the development of gun culture in Canada. How did it develop, where do the guns come from, how do they get here, who is using them and, most importantly, what our politicians tell us they are doing to stop the carnage!

**Tuesday, October 28: Sexual Assault and Consent**

**Speaker Priscilla Pratt: Retired lawyer and author of several books on the youth justice system**

In the wake of the 'me-too' movement there have been many high profile and other prosecutions for sexual assault. Priscilla Platt is a retired Toronto lawyer who practised for nearly 40 years. She began her career in criminal law, serving as both defence counsel and prosecutor, before later specializing in privacy law. What are some of the reasons sexual assault prosecutions often end in acquittals and what changes have occurred in the last several years to fix the system. Our speaker will address these questions and more about sexual assault.

**Tuesday, November 4: Just Desserts: The origin of gangs in Toronto**

**Speaker Sandy Kingston: Crown Counsel**

The press dubbed this case as Toronto's "loss of innocence!" It demonstrates the early development of gangs in our city and the propagation of violence that accompanied their development. Sandy Kingston was the lead prosecutor in this case. The case raised the question: "How could an innocent young girl in Toronto end up dead from random violence? We will look at how this case shaped gun, and gang, culture going forward in Toronto.

**Tuesday, November 11: The Role of the Crown Attorney in the Justice System**  
**Speaker Sandy Kingston, Crown Counsel**

As an Assistant Crown Attorney, Trial Division, for twenty (20) years, and a further seven (7) years as Appellate Counsel at the Ontario Court of Appeal, Sandy Kingston will outline the role of the Crown Attorney in the prosecution of criminal cases. Attendees will learn to distinguish the duties and obligations of the prosecutor with that of the defence counsel. The lecture will explain the unique role of the prosecutor in our criminal justice system. We will compare the role of the prosecutor in our adversarial system of justice to that of the inquisitorial system, as practiced in many European countries.

**Tuesday, November 18: Solitary Confinement: A History in Canada**  
**Speaker Sandy Kingston, Crown Counsel**

Isolation, as a form of punishment, is highly controversial in modern societies. Is prolonged prisoner isolation the only way to control difficult prison populations? Who are the real victims? Is Ashley Smith, a mentally ill teenager who choked herself to death while in solitary confinement as jail guards passively watched, a victim or rightfully detained? Is the change in wording in the most recent legislation, from “solitary confinement” to “administrative isolation” to “structured Intervention Unit” a real step forward from the inhumane days of ‘lock them up and throw away the key?’ The class will examine the use, and abuse, of isolation as a punishment in Canada.

**Tuesday, November 25: MAID (Medical Assistance in Dying)**  
**Speaker Sandy Kingston, Crown Counsel**

In the next twenty-five (25) years, the number of Canadians over the age of 85 could triple! Recent statistics show that 80% of Canadians want the rules and regulations surrounding medical assistance in dying (MAID) eased. Bill C-7, authorizing Medical Assistance in Dying for those suffering from a serious physical illness recently became law in Canada. It could potentially expand to those suffering solely from a mental illness. In this session we will examine the growth of MAID in this country and how we have developed a more liberal approach to assisted death for many Canadians.

**Tuesday, December 2: Criminal Law and the Mentally Ill**  
**Guest Speaker Susan Ficek, Appellate Crown Counsel**

Susan Ficek prosecuted in the Ontario Court of Appeal and Supreme Court of Canada for 32 years. She will discuss how many of those in contact with the Criminal Justice System are mentally ill. She will examine how the mentally ill are treated in the criminal justice system. She will discuss whether this system is the proper place for the mentally ill or whether there are alternatives for those who commit crimes other than jail. If so, what are they?

**Tuesday, December 9: Honey and Barry Sherman – The Billionaire Murders**  
**Guest Speaker Kevin Donovan, Chief Investigative Reporter, Toronto Star**

Honey and Barry Sherman lived a quiet and privileged life in Toronto's Post Road neighbourhood – that is until they were murdered in a gruesome manner in their own home. As a reporter with one of Toronto's leading newspapers, Donovan's focus is on journalism that exposes wrongdoing and effects change. As the Star's editor of investigations for many years, Donovan led many award-winning projects for the paper – one of which is 'Who murdered Honey and Barry Sherman?' - a series exploring not just the deaths but also the police response, competent or incompetent, to the crime. He is the author of several books, including the 'Billionaire Murders', the story of Honey and Barry and their dramatic end.

**Biography**

With a career spanning from 1980 to 2012 in the Criminal Law Division of the Ministry of the Attorney General, Sandra Kingston garnered expertise as Counsel, prosecuting high-profile cases and contributing to initiatives like Justice on Target. Transitioning to education, Sandra showcased her teaching prowess during her tenure at Seneca College from 2011 to 2016, consistently earning high rankings in the Paralegal and Law Clerk programs. She coached Moot Court teams to success, securing victories in prestigious competitions and numerous individual awards. Beyond Seneca, Sandra taught criminal law at Durham College, Humber College and Ryerson University LIFE Network. Her commitment to community engagement is evident through presentations on law-related issues. This unique blend of legal and educational expertise defines her impactful career.

**ALTERNATIVE SPEAKER**

If one speaker is unable to present, Ivan Dolynskyj would be available to fill the gap. He would discuss the Hawley Crippen case – the use of circumstantial evidence to convict. The proposal reads as follows:

Ivan Dolynskyj: In his, as yet, unpublished work, "Ten Steps Above Her Grave", Ivan Dolynskyj explores the now infamous case of Hawley Crippen – accused, and later hanged, for the murder of his wife. Having dismembered her, buried her body parts in several locations (including under his front steps), this case demonstrates the bizarre circumstances of the investigation into her murder and Crippen's ultimate capture. After the murder, Crippen fled England, with his mistress (who disguised herself as a man) heading to Canada by boat. How was Crippen identified and captured? How was he able to initially escape justice in England? Why come to Canada? And, importantly, what evidence existed to arrest him immediately upon his arrival here?

**Committee Contact: Jane Botsford**