

A Push Out into Open Air: A Conversation on Criminality

THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

The prison industrial complex (PIC) is a term we use to describe the overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social, and political problems. Through its reach and impact, the PIC helps and maintains the authority of people who get their power through racial, economic, and other privileges. There are many ways this power is collected and maintained through the PIC, including creating mass media images that keep alive stereotypes of people of color, poor people, queer people, immigrants, youth, and other oppressed communities as criminal, delinquent, or deviant. This power is also maintained by earning huge profits for private companies that deal with prisons and police forces; helping earn political gains for "tough on crime" politicians; increasing the influence of prison guard and police unions; and eliminating social and political dissent by oppressed communities that make demands for self-determination and reorganization of power in the US. - CriticalResistance.org

THE PROBLEM WITH COLOR-BLIND RHETORIC

The idea of color-blindness demands we forget the unfinished business of the past promise that such forgetting will make for us a more just society. For example, we are to remember Dr. King, and the movement he represented, as a sentimentalized proponent of nonviolence and total love. That's all. The other stuff gets tossed in the trashbin, discarded bits of willfully forgotten history. This shift in emphasis involved an appropriation of the language of the civil rights movement by conservatives. King's "I Have a Dream" speech became an important resource in this effort. What stood out for conservatives was not his rejection of the political tools that preserved the value gap; rather it was King's dream of the day when all Americans would be, "judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." They read this to mean that individuals mattered, not the history of groups. Collective injustice gave way to cases of individual injury and demands for individual responsibility. In short, King's dream became the basis for eliminating discussion of race matters from public view. - Eddie S. Glaude Jr. | *Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul* (pg. 103&109)

Evening Itinerary

6:30 - Wine & Cheese

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7:00pm - Introductions

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7:05 - 7:45 - Panel Discussion & Readings

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7:45 - 8:00 - Q&A Session with Panel

(possibility of longer Q&A depending on audience)

Tonight's Moderator

Dr. Michael Borshuk

Mike Borshuk teaches African American literature in the Department of English at Texas Tech University. He is the author of the book *Swinging the Vernacular: Jazz and African American Modernist Literature* and numerous other essays and book chapters on African American literature, modernism, and American music. He serves on the organizing board for the *Sexism in Cinema* film series at Alamo Drafthouse.

Recommended Reading

BOOKS

Cornel West, *Race Matters*

Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*

Angela Y. Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*

Eddie S. Glaude, *Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul*

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*

Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*

Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*

Nate Marshall, *The Wild Hundreds*

Reginald Dwayne Betts, *Bastards of the Reagan Era*

Jesmyn Ward, ed., *The Fire This Time: A New Generation Speaks About Race*

FILMS

13th, Ava DuVernay

Fruitvale Station, Ryan Coogler

WEBSITES

BlackLivesMatter (<http://blacklivesmatter.com/>)

StayWoke.org (<https://staywoke.typeform.com/to/yernqh>)

Frank Leon Roberts's Black Lives Matter Syllabus (<http://www.blacklivesmattersyllabus.com/fall2016/>)

We The Protesters (<http://wetheprotesters.org>)

For any other recommendations, please feel free to reach out to panelists after our event or email michael.borshuk@ttu.edu

Tonight's Panelists

Alfredo Aguilar

Alfredo Aguilar is currently a PhD student in History at Texas Tech University and an associate research editor at the West Texas Historical Association. He has contributed a chapter titled "Uprooted: African Americans in Mexico, International Propaganda, Migration, and the Resistance Against U.S. Racial Hegemony" in an edited volume called *Human Rights, Race and Resistance in the African Diaspora* and written encyclopedia entries on prison gangs. His current research interests are on race and ethnicity, Latino Mass Incarceration, and borderlands studies.

Kyle J. Bassett

Kyle J. Bassett earned his MFA in Poetry from Arizona State University and is currently a Ph.D. student at Texas Tech. His poetry has previously appeared or is forthcoming in *The Unrenewed*, *Commonweal*, *The McNeese Review*, and elsewhere. His essays have appeared in the *Dallas Morning News*, and his art has earned him the 2017 Helen DeVitt Jones print fellowship. He frequently writes about political & social issues, with an emphasis on objectivism & humanism. Kyle is currently working on a book of essays concerning the concept of Structural Blindness & How to Break the White American Narrative. He is also the founder of DUST DEVIL PRESS.

Chen Chen

Chen Chen is the author of *When I Grow Up I Want to Be a List of Further Possibilities*, winner of the A. Poulin, Jr. Poetry Prize and award from BOA Editions, Ltd. A Kundiman and Lambda Literary Fellow, Chen's work has appeared in two chapbooks as well as in publications such as *Poetry*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Poem-a-Day*, *Best of the Net*, and *The Best American Poetry*. He has been featured on the PBS Newshour and Out.com. Chen helps edit *Iron Horse* and *Gabby*. He also works on a new journal called Underblong, which he co-founded with the poet Sam Herschel Wein. Chen is currently pursuing a PhD in English and Creative Writing at Texas Tech University. He lives in Lubbock with his partner Jeff Gilbert and their pug dog Mr. Rupert Giles.

Shayla Corprew

Shayla Corprew is a second-year Masters student in the Texas Tech University English Department's Technical Communication and Rhetoric program. Her undergraduate degrees are in English (Professional Writing concentration) and Africana Studies. After working in industry for several years, she made the decision to return to academia to refresh her skills and gain additional theoretical and praxis-based knowledge in Technical Communication. Her areas of interest include document design, user experience design, cybersecurity practices and technical communicators, grants and proposals, and information design. In addition to fulfilling the requirements to complete coursework, Ms. Corprew also works part-time as a Technical Writer at the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC). She is a member of the Graduate English Society (GES) and the Society for Technical Communication (STC). In her spare time, Ms. Corprew enjoys traveling and studying all things related to the Old and Modern Western American experience.

Proceeds from tonight's donations and letterpress sales are going to the East Lubbock Community Alliance.

<http://eastlubbockcommunityalliance.org/>

A BRIEF TIMELINE OF MASS INCARCERATION

1970:

U.S. Prison Population:
330,000+

1973:

New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller enacts tougher drug laws, including punishments of 15 years to life for even small possession charges.

1983:

Corrections Corporation of America, the country's largest private prison company, founded.

1994:

Clinton signs crime bill that devotes 9.7 billion dollars in funding to prison system.

2016:

U.S. Prison Population:
2.3 million+

1971:

Nixon declares War on Drugs.

1982:

Reagan dedicates more federal resources to War on Drugs.

1986:

Anti-Drug Abuse Act institutes same 5-year minimum sentence for possessing 5 grams of crack cocaine (used mostly by blacks) and 500 grams of powder cocaine (used mainly by whites).

1996:

Clinton enacts welfare reform that creates more obstacles for people convicted of drug crimes to access social safety net.

Vocabulary

criminalization & myth of black

criminal:

the process of making someone or a group of people into criminals based on laws and/or the way they are represented in the media. Because of this, many Americans operate under the false assumption that black people are more likely to be criminals. This myth was created by white media over the course of hundreds of years in order to oppress black people. The myth is so strong that many people of color have come to believe it subconsciously. example: COPS

mass incarceration:

refers to the unique way the U.S. has locked up a vast population in federal and state prisons, as well as local jails. More than 2 million people are incarcerated in U.S. prisons as well as local and county jails. 1 in 3 black men in the United States will go to prison or jail if current trends continue.

mandatory minimum sentences:

A court decision where the judge is not allowed to determine sentence length, but is forced to assign a certain number of years to the defendant by law. Typically, people convicted of certain crimes must be punished with at least a minimum number of years in prison. Mandatory minimums especially effect sentencing of drug offenses. example: crack and cocaine

other vocabulary to consider

civil asset forfeiture

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stop & frisk

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police militarization

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super predator

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prison abolition

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recidivism

Tonight's Readers

Trevor Pace | reading from:

Angela Y. Davis's

Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement

&
Michelle Alexander's

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness

Apryl Lewis | reading the poem:

"Crimson" by Reginald Dwayne Betts

Jen Popa | reading the poem:

"New Rules of the Road" by Reginald Harris

Ross Gay (audio recording) | reading the poem:

"To the Fig Tree on 9th and Christian" by Ross Gay

NOTES