

Abstracts

Against Punishment: Centering Work, Wages, and Uneven Development in Mapping the Carceral State

Brett Story & Judah Schept

The carceral state's tenacity draws its strength from diverse political and economic pools, allowing prisons, jails, and other constitutive parts to serve as solutions to very different kinds of communities navigating through different elements of neoliberal crisis. Drawing from fieldwork conducted in the coalfields of eastern Kentucky, where prisons are built on and adjacent to former mining sites, we make an argument against evaluating prison reform through the narrow framework of crime and punishment. Instead, we find that the carceral state's tenacious grip on society has less to do with a given punishment or treatment regime and everything to do with the ravages of racial capitalism and attendant concerns about work and wages.

On (In)justice: Undisciplined Abolitionism in Canada

Nicolas Carrier & Justin Piché

In this article, we analyze the ways in which abolitionism is presented as an imperative in communications operating outside of the constraints of academia in Canada. More specifically, we examine how abolitionist discourses concerning what is (un)just present themselves when they do not have to play by the rules of academic communications, how groups and individuals explain the need for abolitionist struggles when communicating in a way that is not described as a social scientific practice, and whether these discourses reveal aspects of abolitionist thought that have yet to enter academic debates.

The Role of Peacemaking in Penal Abolition

Hal Pepinsky

Political forces are grounded in what those who are punished most by the state—prisoners—tell us, and in the experiences of those who are punished and threatened more by state violence at all levels of the criminal justice system—as Black and Brown lives are in the United States. These forces can have significant short-term abolitionist effects, both on incarceration levels and on the treatment of those who are policed and incarcerated. The durability of political abolition of state punishment—of incarceration especially—depends on members of any society becoming comfortable with talking through their grievances, directly and safely, with those they blame and fear and, in Roger Fisher et al.'s (1991) terms, “get to yes!” on how to proceed. I call studying and learning to follow this practice “peacemaking.” Here, I draw especially on issues surrounding the violence of policing, of prosecution, of incarceration, and in communities and schools to illustrate how principles of peacemaking are and can be applied, thereby breaking the punishment habit.

Who Is Mired in Utopia? The Logics of Criminal Justice and Penal Abolition

Michael J. Coyle

In this article I argue that “criminal justice” logic rests on a thoroughly utopian interpretation of humans, justice institutions, and society, and that penal abolition logic rests on a grounded realism that is nonutopian. I demonstrate this by questioning the concepts and data entailed in three “criminal justice” assumptions: (1) that most people are good (law abiding) and some are bad (“criminals”); (2) that our “criminal justice” institutions (law, police, courts, and prisons), by the threat and/or imposition of punishment, can be and are an effective social control mechanism to prevent “crime”; and (3) that by controlling “criminal” persons through “criminal justice” institutions, we construct the good society (an ordered existence, justice and public safety, and a meaningful, shared community life). I show that these claims are not supported by the evidence. Because penal abolition is a call to abolish “criminal justice,” it is actually a call to end utopian thinking about persons, utopist acting of institutions, and utopian visions of society.

We Are All Criminals: The Abolitionist Potential of Remembering

Denise Woodall

Most people have committed crimes, but few have been caught. These individuals hold positions of sociolegal power by remaining unmarked. Findings from a survey administered to 209 university students following a criminal activity checklist exercise suggest that recall leads to increased identification with marked criminals and that identification is associated with decreased punitiveness and increased empathy. Through this common classroom intervention, the unmarked participants experienced a blurring of the socially constructed border between themselves and the marked, disrupting, to an extent and for a moment, positions of power that have served to justify and sustain social status positions and carceral forms.

Abolitionist Pedagogy in the Neoliberal University: Notes on Trauma-Informed Practice, Collaboration, and Confronting the Impossible

Ardath Whynacht, Emily Arsenault & Rachael Cooney

In this article, the authors offer a critical reflection on an experimental critical criminology seminar course that was designed to provide a framework for abolitionist learning. Trauma-informed pedagogy and peer-led learning are suggested as concrete ways to build and maintain spaces of trust and vulnerability while tackling difficult subjects such as violence and systems of oppression. When students are supported in forming new and different relationships with each other, alternative and more radical forms of collaboration and imagination become possible. Despite the challenges posed by the neoliberal university, trauma-informed pedagogy and radical forms of collaboration and imagination can hold space for abolitionist learning in the university classroom and beyond.