

Rethinking Prisons Conference – Organized Panels

For a further description of each presentation on the panel, please see *Individual Abstracts*.

Entries Down the Rabbit Hole: Exploring Zero Tolerance & Cradle to Prison Pipeline

Children’s Defense Fund Pipeline to Prison Field and Faith Organizing Team:

Damien Durr

Independent Scholar/Activist

Shakya Cherry-Donaldson

Independent Scholar/Activist/Educator/Sister of Ex-Insider

Ndume Olatushani

Ex- Deathrow Insider/ Activist/ Artist

Janet Wolf

Independent Scholar/Activist/Educator

(Moderator)

Eric Brown

Abstract Writer

This panel explores the strategies and challenges of the Children’s Defense Fund to dismantle the cradle to prison pipeline, with an emphasis on zero tolerance policies. Zero tolerance is an entry point in America's pipeline to prison — a route that leads to marginalized lives, imprisonment and often-premature death. This panel looks for ways of to engage in community building and ethnic historical education for alternatives to the juvenile justice system. Although the majority of fourth graders cannot read at grade level, states spend about three

times as much money per prisoner as per public school pupil. The prison pipeline powers off pervasive poverty, racial disparities, inadequate health and mental health care, gaps in early childhood development, disparate educational opportunities, chronic abuse and neglect, and overburdened and ineffective juvenile detention facilities. The Cradle to Prison Pipeline is an urgent national crisis that leaves a Black boy born in 2001 with a one in three risk of going to prison. It also leaves a Latino boy with a one in six risk of confinement. CDF's vision with its Cradle to Prison Pipeline campaign is to reduce detention and incarceration by increasing preventive supports and services children need, such as access to quality early childhood development and education services and accessible, comprehensive health and mental health coverage. Through a faith-based direct action organizing, this panel explores role-plays, personal stories, and common folk think tanks (*Organic Scholarship*) to shift this crisis. The utilization of strategic relationship building helps advance the cause in dismantling early crime records that follow from child imprisonment to life-time systematic adult incarceration.

Rethinking Prisons through the Lens of Reproductive Justice

Victoria Law

Independent scholar, Birthing Behind Bars coordinator, author of *Resistance Behind Bars: The Struggles of Incarcerated Women*

Tina Reynolds

Co-founder and Executive Director of Women on the Rise Telling HerStory (WORTH), formerly incarcerated mother

Rachel Roth

Independent scholar, former Soros Justice Fellow, reproductive justice advocate, author of *Making Women Pay: The Hidden Costs of Fetal Rights*

Our panel examines the intersections of reproductive justice and incarceration. Incarcerated people are often invisible in discussions of reproductive justice while conversations about incarceration usually ignore reproductive justice as a prison issue. The concept of reproductive justice encompasses a woman's right to be a mother as well as the right not to be made a mother against one's will. Developed by feminists of color, the concept of reproductive justice takes into

account histories of oppression and the particularities of race, class, gender, and sexuality to envision a world where people have the power and resources they need to make their own decisions about reproduction.

In this panel, we will examine the ways that imprisonment undermines reproductive justice by compromising women's health and family relationships. We will examine the experience of mothering from behind bars and the ways that the increase in women's incarceration has extinguished the right of many women, particularly low-income women of color, to be mothers. We will also explore the obstacles to safe and healthy pregnancies as well as to abortion access for women in jail and prison. We will emphasize steps that outside supporters and advocates can take – and have taken – to help ensure access to reproductive health care for people in women's prisons and to protect the legal rights of incarcerated parents.

We are especially interested in discussing the ways that advocates and supporters can avoid falling into the trap of supporting prison expansion under the guise of “caring about women” while still pushing for reforms that address women's immediate and concrete needs. In particular, we will highlight campaigns to end the shackling of incarcerated pregnant women during labor and delivery and campaigns to preserve the parental rights of incarcerated women. Our panelists bring their perspectives as scholars, activists, and formerly incarcerated people to this discussion.

Going Public with Prison Writing

Tobi Jacobi

Associate Professor of English, Colorado State University

Stacy Bell

Senior Lecturer in English, Oxford College, Georgia

Michele Dishong McCormack

Professor and Chair of Communications and Performing Arts. Chemeketa Community College

Literacy work with incarcerated students takes many forms, from occasional voluntary workshops to structured programs inside correctional institutions. The members of this panel have a common goal: to increase public awareness of incarcerated voices. We offer critical perspectives on circulating the written work emerging from prison-sanctioned creative writing workshops and academic writing classes through events and publication. Speakers will highlight the challenges and opportunities that emerge from three diverse approaches to sharing the voices of the incarcerated with people on the outside.

While the literature indicates the efficacy of having the imprisoned tell their own stories, a less studied question the panelists will consider is the potentially transformative nature of exchanges between students who are incarcerated and those who are not. Gathering and disseminating information about these exchanges presents challenges and benefits; the challenges provide intriguing research questions to consider when situating such work as part of a movement toward social change. The panelists are interested in how the circulation of inside voices might intersect with and influence dialogues on prison reform, corrections public policy, and the educational/creative writing programs behind bars. The panelists will address the dissonance created by facilitating valuable prison-sanctioned programs which require compliance and complicity within a dysfunctional system. Working in prisons with the permission of corrections departments is not negotiable, and, as such, panelists will discuss the constraints that this work can place on their professional jobs and on their lives as private citizens.

The Interstices of Punishment and Discipline: Interrogating Race, Gender, Sexuality and Incarceration

Enedina do Amparo Alves

Sao Paulo Catholic University (PUC-SP)

Haile Eshe Cole

Doctoral Candidate, The University of Texas at Austin, Department of Anthropology/African Diaspora Studies

Elvia Mendoza

Doctoral Candidate, The University of Texas at Austin, Department of Anthropology

This panel explores the multiplicity of violent state practices against black and brown women within the carceral regime. We engage this discussion from geographically distinct, yet thematically aligned geographies of power and violence such as the judicial system in São Paulo, community rehabilitation programs in New York, and court archives in Texas to locate and interpret how the state makes and unmakes black and brown women's bodies as punishable and outlawed at the intersections of race, sexuality, gender, and class. It documents how these women are made visible through the punishment and disciplining of their bodies handed down by the state, while simultaneously made invisible as subjects of rights. By looking at such practices, we aim to bring to the forefront the complex ways in which the patriarchal state reclaims ownership over black and brown women's bodies: the law recognizes their personhood only to the extent of punishment and at the same time aims to conform their always/already outlawed bodies into particular regimes of discipline, such as rehabilitation projects. What kinds of subjectivities are created when the state inscribes violence upon these bodies while at the same time implementing rehabilitative practices stemming from the same logic of discipline? What are the mechanisms by which the state continues to (re)produce notions of truth and justice while rendering black and brown women invisible and hyper-visible? How might we conceive justice, law, and citizenship within the context of state production of outlawed subjects? We argue that in order to account for the contemporary formations of state practices and the violent outcomes it inherently produces, we need to interrogate the various sites in which it professes to offer remedies. Finally, through these observations we unveil the "creative" ways in which the *magic of the state* (re)generates and (re)legitimizes violence against black and brown women through the logic of the carceral regime.

From Intractability to Possibility: Intervention and the Carceral

Michelle Brown

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Tennessee

Melissa Burch

PhD Student, Department of Anthropology (Diaspora/Activist concentration), University of Texas – Austin

Judah Schept

Assistant Professor, School of Justice Studies, Eastern Kentucky University

This panel examines the “discourses, policies, and practices” that accompany prison systems and carceral regimes but with an eye toward successful intervention frameworks. Ranging in topic from prisoner reentry to carceral expansion projects to global penal configurations, each of these papers points toward seeming sites of intractability – forces of individualization, growth, and globalization – in imprisonment and reveals them as lived spaces with the capacity to be acted upon and reshaped in the social and political realm. With attention to the ways in which dominant logics and discourses structure penal processes of “transformation” and “expansion,” presenters lay out how alternative programs, counter-narratives, and a politics of intervention may successfully complicate and undercut the oppressive structures that undergird punishment, culminating in spaces of radical transformation.

Safety beyond Incarceration: Normative Foundations and Community Responses

James A. Manos

DePaul University, Department of Philosophy

Chad Kautzer

Department of Philosophy, University of Colorado Denver

Sarah Tyson

Department of Philosophy, University of Colorado, Denver

Mass incarceration is propelled by concerns for safety. In fact, the more mass incarceration becomes a permanent feature in our lives, the more difficult it becomes to think of the concept of safety outside of the state's juridical apparatus and carceral web. Reconceptualizing the concept of safety outside of the state, and thus the concept of community, is central to the project of prison abolition. This panel engages in three different approaches in rethinking the concept of safety. By bringing together Immanuel Kant and Mikhail Bakunin, James Manos' paper argues for a categorical imperative of prison abolition based on reconfiguring Kant's "kingdom of ends" as a "constellation of ends," which grounds the concept of community in the respect of freedom and safety of all. Chad Kautzer's paper argues coercive state strategies of incarceration are evidence of a social pathology insofar as their juridical foundation undermines the informal normative order of communities, thereby rendering them less safe. Sarah Tyson's paper uses Judith Butler's work on vulnerability to examine the work of community activists in Seattle who refuse to rely on the state's carceral web to solve problems of violence within their community, so as to offer up practices and concepts to aid in the reconceptualization of safety.

Teaching and Learning at Nashville Area Prisons

Richard Goode

Professor, History Department, Lipscomb University

Daniel Joranko

Adjunct Faculty, Vanderbilt University Divinity School

Amy-Jill Levine

Professor, Vanderbilt University Divinity School

Bruce Morrill

Professor, Vanderbilt University Divinity School

(Moderator)

Vanderbilt University Divinity School and Lipscomb University both have ongoing programs that bring regular courses, both professor and students, from their faculties into men's and women's prisons in Nashville. The four members of this panel will give brief (10-minute) presentations of their experiences in these educational endeavors. Dr. Joranko, who coordinates the course Vanderbilt Divinity School offers each semester at Riverbend Maximum Security Institute, will describe the program's history and structure, as well as some observations about its impact upon both the Riverbend participants and Vanderbilt Divinity students. Dr. Levine and Dr. Morrill will each give accounts of their offering courses in Vanderbilt Divinity's program at Riverbend, including some consideration of how their teaching in the prison context has influenced their vocations as research scholars and educators. Dr. Goode will likewise describe the LIFE (Lipscomb Initiative for Education) Program, wherein professor and some thirty students join thirty prisoners for a liberal arts course in Tennessee Prison for Women. With a close, indeed founding role in that program, he will offer his observations and insights into the benefits prisoners, university undergraduates, and professors all garner through the prison classroom experience. Time for discussion and interaction among panelists and audience will ensue.

Teaching Freedom: Humanities Education in the Prison Classroom

Bill Dixon

PhD Candidate in Political Science, Johns Hopkins University and
Teaching Faculty at Bard Prison Initiative, Bard College

Eric Anthamatten

PhD Candidate in Philosophy, New School for Social Research and
teaches philosophy to inmates in New York City

Grace Hunt, PhD.

Postdoctoral Fellow at the Hannah Arendt Center for Humanities and Politics at Bard College. Teaching Faculty at Bard Prison Initiative, Bard College

What does it mean, ethically, pedagogically, and politically, to teach politics and ethics to incarcerated people in the United States, especially in the twenty-first century era of “the new Jim Crow”? Our panel examines the varied ways that a humanities curriculum can challenge the retributive rhetoric that continues to dominate criminal justice in the U.S. Turning to the intersection of politics and ethics as we have experienced it in the prison classroom, we ask whether such an education can develop or redistribute dignity— affirmed and sustained by a shared sense of belonging and common action over time.

Transformation Within/Without: Alexander Correctional Institution and the Restoration of Human Dignity

Ron Neal

Department of Religion and American Ethnic Studies, Wake Forest University

Chaplain Daniel Redding

Alexander Correctional Institution, Taylorsville, NC

Sandy Gentei Stewart

NC Zen Center Sosen-ji The Brooks Branch Zendo

Rev. Joe Ingle

United Church of Christ; has worked with prisoners on death row across the South

Ulrike Wiethaus

Department of Religion and American Ethnic Studies, Wake Forest University

(Moderator)

This panel seeks to overcome the constraints of a flawed moral and legal logic that drives mass incarceration in the United States and reproduces race and class inequality. It explores alternatives to a justice model motivated by the principle of retribution and the reproduction of inequality rather than the restoration of human dignity. The panel brings together a veteran prison chaplain, a scholar of religion, and a Zen Buddhist abbot in an effort to instigate this kind of conversation. All panelists and the chair have collaborated intensely with prayer groups at Alexander Correctional Institution (AXCI).

A Working Group Discussion: Counting the Cost of Death, or How to Effectively Measure and Communicate How Much the Death Penalty Costs

Amy Sayward

Professor of History, Middle Tennessee State University

Margaret Vandiver

Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Memphis

Stacy Rector

Executive Director, Tennesseans for Alternatives to the Death Penalty

In this “working group discussion,” we seek the input of all those who attend on the question—How can we effectively measure and communicate how much the death penalty costs? The discussion will begin with some introductory comments from the panelists about the costs of the current system, the importance of measuring and communicating these costs, the difficulties of gaining needed data, and some of the ideas we have developed to this end.

If Tennessee is going to make any progress toward abolition, we have to have an effective way to communicate the death penalty’s cost to legislators and the general public. When these costs in general, Tennessee activists in recent years have focused on the cost of a capital vs. a non-capital trial, because this is the most expensive part of death penalty system; this data is also somewhat easier to access. But there are a number of obstacles to determining these costs, including

the lack of access to records in some offices, the exorbitant costs charged to gain copies of public records, and the decentralized nature of the record-keeping. Additionally, a comprehensive, death-penalty cost study, like Maryland's recent one, is very expensive, is difficult to communicate to the lay person, and therefore can be relatively easily discredited by groups who have a stake in maintaining the current system. Therefore, Tennesseans for Alternatives to the Death Penalty has been seeking to identify measures that can be determined and communicated relatively easily, such as the number of pre-trial motions filed, the number of days spent in court, and the amount of time devoted to selecting a "death-qualified" jury.

We would like to have the input of this dynamic community of activists and scholars on this important question during this working group discussion.