



Carceral Capitalism

Jackie Wang

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Essays on the contemporary continuum of incarceration: the biopolitics of juvenile delinquency, predatory policing, the political economy of fees and fines, and algorithmic policing.

What we see happening in Ferguson and other cities around the country is not the creation of livable spaces, but the creation of living hells. When people are trapped in a cycle of debt it also can affect their subjectivity and how they temporally inhabit the world by making it difficult for them to imagine and plan for the future. What psychic toll does this have on residents? How does it feel to be routinely dehumanized and exploited by the police?—from *Carceral Capitalism*

In this collection of essays in Semiotext(e)'s Intervention series, Jackie Wang examines the contemporary incarceration techniques that have emerged since the 1990s. The essays illustrate various aspects of the carceral continuum, including the biopolitics of juvenile delinquency, predatory policing, the political economy of fees and fines, cybernetic governance, and algorithmic policing. Included in this volume is Wang's influential critique of liberal anti-racist politics, "Against Innocence," as well as essays on *RoboCop*, techno-policing, and the aesthetic problem of making invisible forms of power legible.

Wang shows that the new racial capitalism begins with parasitic governance and predatory lending that extends credit only to dispossess later. Predatory lending has a decidedly spatial character and exists in many forms, including subprime mortgage loans, student loans for sham for-profit colleges, car loans, rent-to-own scams, payday loans, and bail bond loans. Parasitic governance, Wang argues, operates through five primary techniques: financial states of exception, automation, extraction and looting, confinement, and gratuitous violence. While these techniques of governance often involve physical confinement and the state-sanctioned execution of black Americans, new carceral modes have blurred the distinction between the inside and outside of prison. As technologies of control are perfected, carcerality tends to bleed into society.

Carceral Capitalism Details

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From Reader Review *Carceral Capitalism* for online ebook

Sohum says

Notes on the debt economy wasn't very analytical, but the other essays are quite excellent. And I would note that the bibliography is a syllabus in itself.

Ruth says

I had a lot of strong reactions to this book, and I want to save them for the discussion in my book group and not spoil them. To summarize, this is a book about how predatory lending and financialization (two fancy ways of saying making money off of poor people) fuel other kinds of injustice, including the absurdly high level of incarceration in the US. None of it could happen without racism. On one foot: some people destroy the entire society to make money on the backs of the most vulnerable, the rest of us allow them to because of our delusions about race.

Dave says

Important testimony on criminal justice, and use of technology to confine for profit (actual prison no longer necessary)

Gabriel C. says

Some parts of this, especially background detailing, I knew. But several key points of both the theoretical framing and practical criticism, were new and useful. For example, the theoretical basis espoused here for the refusal to deny the legitimacy of violent means was new to me, and I thought the specific objections to predictive policing were cogently put and totally on point.

From the way Wang writes, it's possible that some of the things that were new to me were compilations or applications of points made by others. This isn't meant as a dig at all---my experience reading this kind of work in general is that it can be difficult, heavy, and unpleasant reading, but this concoction is airy, eminently readable, clearly put, thoughtful, embodied, and passionate. To the extent that it incorporates distillations of others' essence, it's likely that I'd have a much harder time with the original.

Alex says

???

Chris says

This exploration of the various methods of racialised control the state uses (in this case the US) is pretty jaw dropping at times. It does a really good job of linking up economic control (mainly focused on the appalling exploitation and expropriation through debt that defines capitalism today) alongside expropriation through predatory policing and through to incarceration itself.

Some of the theoretical constellations Wang makes didn't quite land for me (but maybe that's on me) but the narrative constructed here is very compelling and very clearly sketches out the systematised, racialised injustice and expropriation of contemporary capitalism and the linkages that the state does its best to hide. An important book. I loved the last chapter as well.

Zach Terrell says

What do we make
of the flowering vine
that uses as its trellis
the walls of a prison?

Jackie Wang has done us all a favor with this deeply researched and personal accounting for the racialized social order that is produced by late-capitalist accumulation. What a profound and timely reinscription of post-Marxist theory for 2018...and from such a young mind! I'll definitely be keeping tabs on her future work.

Reads well alongside Ursula Le Guin's short story "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas".

Side note: A few years ago I wrote my master's thesis on Roberto Esposito. It was a terrible, aimless paper, but I felt and still feel that his work in biopolitics and the immunitary paradigm is *the* theoretical framework for today. I was so excited to see Esposito make an appearance in Chapter 3 of *Carceral Capitalism*. Wang did an amazing job kneading his work into her interrogation of predatory conceptions of juvenile delinquency---no mean feat. Might this signal more popular use of Esposito's work? One can only hope!

K says

"Our bodies are not closed loops. We hold each other and keep each other in time by marching, singing, embracing, breathing. We synchronize our tempos so we can find a rhythm through which the urge to live can be expressed, collectively. And in this way, we set the world into motion. In this way, poets become the timekeepers of the revolution."

It took me a while to finish this book, because it's pretty dense honestly. When I first started I was like am I smart enough to read this? But I kept coming back when I needed guidance, when I was ready to expand, when I was ready to heal and learn in ways my program could never provide me. This book combines abolition with poetry, afro pessimism with optimism and radical imagination. Only read if you're ready for a complete restructuring of the world as you knew it. Only read if you're ready to dream and think critically of

a world without prisons. Actually, read it anyways, because by the end you'll be ready to learn more.

Dawn says

Insightful series of essays on race & racism, finance, capitalism, debt, risk and criminalization by one of the sharpest thinkers of our times. Well worth a careful read.

Raia says

i learned a lot from these essays about incarceration, financialization and debt, policing and automation, and the pitfalls of innocence vs. guilt discourse. while there are a lot of smart books on contemporary capitalism, i appreciate that jackie wang doesn't lose sight of the human impact of her arguments. my favorite parts of the book were where she talked about her brother's incarceration and its toll on her and her family. i appreciated the scope of her arguments that used political economy and afropessimist critiques to explain the workings of the prison industrial complex. at times i wondered why she didn't engage more heavily with stuart hall's "policing the crisis" or ruth wilson gilmore's "the golden gulag," because both those books felt very relevant to the arguments wang makes. at a theoretical level, i'm still contemplating the distinction between expropriation and exploitation as two overlapping accumulative logics of capitalism.

Eileen Ying says

brilliant book, quite possibly the best piece of "academic" writing i've read this year. jackie wang approaches the U.S. criminal justice system with a keenly variegated critical lens. in my experience, most contemporary scholarship on the topic circulates around the narrative popularized by 13th – prison industrial complex, slavery to jim crow to the modern carceral state, etc. – which is indisputably important, but sometimes forecloses further theoretical exploration. wang describes herself as a *student of the dream state, black studies scholar, prison abolitionist, poet, performer, library rat, [and] trauma monster*, and if that in itself doesn't make you want to read the book...we're not friends. her unconventional background shows. her writing is so much more engaging than the typical piece churned out of the academe. it's poetic, even when it isn't (sometimes it literally is. poetry). yet it's also so sharp theoretically. wang pulls together marxism, foucauldian bio/necropolitics, postcolonialism, afropessimism, literature, poetry, autobiography, and a hundred other subjects and subfields with such ease. i thought "racialized accumulation by dispossession in the age of finance capital," "packing guns instead of lunches," and "against innocence" were particularly good. i was honestly moved to tears at times, which never happens when i read theory! not out of sadness, per se, but out of some weird intellectual/political exaltation. ah. i feel like this has opened up so many new avenues of thought for me. my to-read list, at least, has swelled.

Josh says

"Against Innocence"!!!

Mat says

This book had me from beginning to end and has completely energized me in how I think about prisons, freedom, capitalism, and the world we live in. While her themes and progress are less than obvious or linear, everything fits together in a way that is alarming, fresh, and sensible. There are moments that satisfy my need for data and knowing more more more, and moments where the sheer poetry makes me cry. The majority of the book I found myself constantly bringing up things I learned in conversation. Predictive Policing. Slave economy vs worker economy versus debt economy and all the small ways these different constructs have failed people. Superpredators and shifting modes of racism. I couldn't stop talking about all the factoids and connections in this book. At first the 95 page introduction seemed daunting, but it actually outlined the entire premise of the book very succinctly and coherently. In fact, it could be read as its own work if someone wasn't up for the whole book, which is, admittedly a bit academic and possibly not for everyone. The last chapter, however, is less academic and should be mandatory reading. My notes on the last chapter say "REREAD THIS CHAPTER EVERY TIME YOU NEED GROUNDING". For example, there is a segment in the chapter talks about how the men of Attica felt when they saw the stars on the first day of the rebellion. After sitting with the images conjured by those series of readings I am convinced that every single person in this nation should try to imagine that feeling at least once, if not every day. We are so lacking in compassion much less the capacity to feel bound in one another's struggle, and I feel Wang transcends expository argument and goes on to conjure what it could feel like to experience such a culture shift. This book convinced me how far I am from conceiving of what freedom means and how vital it is for me to spend every day of my life trying to understand what it is and doing anything possible to work toward the possibility of us getting any fraction closer to it as we possibly can.

Leah says

-exclusion and dehumanization
-good chapter on debt and racial accumulation by dispossession

Amelia Eskenazi says

Absolutely imperative read. Wang flawlessly critiques the interwoven dynamics of late stage capitalism and the carceral continuum through analyses of expropriation, children's toys, algorithmic policing etc all the while in conversation with scholars such as Fanon, Esposito, and Foucault.
