

# The Anarchist Review *of Books*

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days of good conduct credits pushing an already long release date back further. On top of that, I get re-booked for the same charges at the District Court...and had to take a plea deal which added six more months to my sentence. You might ask what I'm doing carrying around a weapon in the first place but after seeing on numerous occasions men dying from inmate-on-inmate knife fights, I usually need to keep access to some sort of weapon if confrontation comes my way...

—Adrain Outten, *Contesting Carceral Logic*

### Reforms Have Been Making It Worse

"If there are 'career criminals' weighing the odds and making clever choices, then they are probably getting away with their crimes which would explain why I've never met any of them in prison."

—Richard Sean Gross, *Contesting Carceral Logic*

*Carceral Con* (Whitlock & Heitzig, editors), delineates how incarceration has expanded hand-in-hand with reforms touted to reduce prison populations. Writing in their introduction that civil rights advocates have joined with conservative groups under the banner of prison reform, the authors dub those strange bedfellows, their agendas and policy templates "the bipartisan consensus."

For example, promises to end 'overcriminalization' litter bipartisan talking points. But that's a word deceptive as quicksand. The bipartisan consensus intentionally sidesteps the matter of explosive growth in immigrant detention. Even though being in the United States without the required authorization is considered a civil, not a criminal, infraction...a decades-long fusion of immigration policy with processes of criminalization and aggressive policing—"crimmigration"—has been an expansive bipartisan project.

Efforts to divert the accused into drug courts and community supervision "increasingly entangle defendants with burdensome expectations and escalating schedules of fines and fees that increase the likelihood of eventual detention." Diversionary programs, for example, may require participants to pay for and undergo

drug tests whether or not their original charge involved drugs, or to maintain full-time employment while also adhering to curfews and actively shunning people (including relatives, friends and so forth) with criminal records. Probation, which operates on the assumption that the state's aim of punishment can be accomplished outside jail or prison, increasingly becomes a pathway to incarceration as the list of requirements placed on probationers becomes less and less workable: "Hundreds of thousands of people are subject to excessive fees and surveillance because they were too poor to pay the initial fines and court fees." Nonprofits involved in prison work can become part of the surveillance network as they seek permissions from jail and prison authorities to interact with people on the inside.

### Building Better Communities

*Lessons in Liberation*, a handbook for educators, is a mixed bag of academic essays, advocacy writings, art and classroom instruction assembled for adults to assist young people—primarily low-income youth and Black, Indigenous and youth of color—to resist and address the school-to-prison pipeline. "This toolkit is by and for those committed to starving the prison industrial complex and seeding and feeding new systems of care, safety and freedom." Produced by The Education for Liberation Network & Critical Resistance Editorial Collective, the book invites educators to understand and practice abolition as a way to create trust in teaching relationships, while giving the children they teach real tools to survive in a society pressing them toward incarceration: "Abolitionist educators struggle to live, work, do and be in right relation with others at all times; there is an alignment between what they espouse and what they actually model." The book assists educators in validating the experiences of students and teaching self-care and self-advocacy. "Abolitionist educators distinguish accountability from punishment, leveraging transformative justice and other forms of community accountability to strengthen safety, repair relationships and adjudicate harm." With its focus on young people and on changing and building systems, the toolkit has moments of fun and optimism; acknowledgements of the need for spiritual renewal and rest for teachers and children; voices of women of color and caring perspectives. It is dynamic, lively, sad, thoughtful, and incomplete—the start of a good conversation.

### Truth-telling on the Inside

Finally, *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration*, which accompanied the MoMA/PS1 exhibit of prisoners' art curated by Nicole R. Fleetwood, showcases "the visual culture of mass incarceration" and argues for its place in the canon of American art. Prison art is produced under duress, with artists having limited access to materials or space. Paper and pens are routinely limited or confiscated for rule infractions, or for no reason at all. Prison art is also used as currency and can be taken from or traded away by the artists. It can be burdened by peculiar aesthetic rules, for instance favoring abstract aesthetics and landscapes because wardens monitor the art for gang symbols.

Fleetwood writes, "One of the challenges of writing this book is that many currently and formerly incarcerated artists are not in possession of their art...Art made in prison is sent to relatives, traded with fellow prisoners, sold or 'gifted' to prison staff, donated to nonprofit organizations and sometimes made for private clients. Unlike artists who work outside prisons, who are able to document their creations, incarcerated artists often are unable to photograph or make copies of their work. There are people I interviewed who described their work and practices to me but had nothing to show."

The beauty of this book is that art is language, and prisoners can speak to those on the outside with it. The artists are all excellent, and rather than diminish the work of some by praising a few (for lack of space), I would rather direct the reader to the website accompanying the exhibit, [markingtimeart.com](http://markingtimeart.com).

I particularly loved Fleetwood's chapter on prison photographs, the ones inmates are allowed to take on special occasions, in prison "studios" with their loved ones. Posing for such photographs may be the only time prisoners are allowed to hug visitors. The photographs let prisoners place themselves in relation to their families and friends, to reclaim a sense of self and belonging in the outside world. One photograph, which was returned to a family member of Fleetwood after years of absence, had been in the possession of an old-timer for many years. "He wasn't familiar with anyone in it or where it had been taken. He...liked it because it was a photo of beautiful women with children. It reminded him of home."

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## An Anatomy of the World

Shawn Miller

### Inflamed: Deep Medicine and the Anatomy of Injustice

by Rupa Marya and Raj Patel

496pp. Holtzbrinck Publishing Group 2021

*Inflamed* is a timely book about the perennial injustice of colonialism and its devastating impacts on human health. Industrialized societies are beset by diseases of inflammation, such as Covid, which disproportionately afflict marginalized communities. The solution is deep medicine, which demands nothing less than the abolition of colonial cosmology. The book does not lack in ambition.

Written by physician Rupa Marya and political economist Raj Patel, *Inflamed* is a "subversive political anatomical survey" of eight bodily systems: the immune system, circulatory system, digestive system, connective tissue, endocrine system, and nervous system. They assert that the "inflammatory diseases we are seeing today are not the cause of the body's dysfunctional reactions. They are the body's correct responses to a pathological world." The authors demonstrate, for instance, how social oppression preconditions the bodies of Black people in the United States to develop gastric cancer. They also show how the "amount of melanin in your skin is inversely proportional to the likelihood that you will leave a US hospital alive after suffering cardiac arrest."

The book's argument is straightforward and persuasive. The world makes us sick. This world—full of bursting with racist law enforcement, poverty, hunger, discrimination, displacement, and exposure to toxins—this world is the way it is because of colonialism. Therefore, to get well, we must change the world, that is, embrace Indigenous cosmologies that replace a worldview of domination, exploitation, and profit with one characterized by reciprocity, care for the land, for water, and for living beings.

Modern medicine itself is rife with injustice. Most



Distance by Nereida Garcia Ferraz. Ink on paper 2021

doctors "have unwittingly inherited a colonial worldview that emphasizes individual health, disconnecting illness from its social and historical contexts and obscuring our place in the web of life that makes us who we are." The authors use the concept of the exposome to illustrate our embeddedness in the world. The exposome is everything that a person is exposed to during the course of a lifetime and "encompasses chemical, social, psychological, ecological, historical, political, and biological elements and determines whether aging cells will become drivers of chronic systemic inflammation." The exposomes of the poor and the oppressed are often characterizable in terms of chronic stress and toxicity.

Sickness and premature death are the inevitable result.

The authors do an admirable job of tracing the myriad causes of our collective ill health, drawing on Marya's work as an internal medicine physician at the University of California, San Francisco. The reader will learn a great deal about biological systems and the wretched history of colonial crimes. The reader will also encounter some nice one-liners, like "California strawberry fields are a part of a global assembly line of high technology, land theft, and human disposability."

*Inflamed* struggles somewhat to clearly articulate its vision of deep medicine. We read that deep medicine starts with the "act of repairing those relationships that have been damaged through systems of domination." Deep medicine is holistic and operates at the level of the system rather than the individual. It requires the abolition of patriarchy, including the gender categories it has created. Deep medicine, indeed, "will require the abolition of the colonial hospital itself." And, since Marya and Patel believe that modern medicine is colonial medicine, this means the abolition of all modern hospitals.

The concept of abolition is also left a bit underspecified. We are told that it is one of deep medicine's central prescriptions and that it "isn't a negative rejection but a positive embrace of a better way of doing things." We read that "abolition means holding life precious" and that transcending colonialism "will involve a collective journey to new forms of exchange and relations." That's fine, if a bit gauzy.

But *Inflamed* is not meant as a how-to book of personal improvement or political enlightenment. It is a call to action, and a call, specifically, to empathize with the sick, who have been made so by forces outside of their control. It demands, at minimum, that we hear the stories of the oppressed, that we believe them, and take their pain and suffering seriously. That is the only path to healing.

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