

**SIX**

## REVIEW ESSAY OF BOOKS ON WOMEN IN PRISON

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*Reviewed books:*

*Resistance behind Bars: Struggles of Incarcerated Women* by Victoria Law, PM Press, 2009, pp. v plus pp. 258.

*Global Lockdown: Race, Gender, and the Prison-Industrial Complex* by Julia Sudbury (Ed.), Routledge, 2006, pp. 323.

*Razor Wire Women: Prisoners, Activists, Scholars, and Artists* by Jodie M. Lawston and Ashley E. Lucas (Eds.), SUNY Press, 2011, pp. xxiii plus pp. 325.

*Interrupted Life: Experiences of Incarcerated Women in the United States* by Rickie Solinger, Paula C. Johnson, Martha L. Raimon, Tina Reynolds, Ruby C. Tapia (Eds.), University of California Press, 2010, pp. 458.

*Reading is My Window: Books and the Art of Reading in Women's Prisons* by Megan Sweeney, University of North Carolina Press, 2010, pp. 332.

*Couldn't Keep it to Myself: Testimonies from our Imprisoned Sisters* by Wally Lamb and the Women of York Correctional Institution, Harper Perennial, 2003, pp. 350.

*"Whores and Thieves of the Worst Kind": A Study of Women, Crime, and Prisons, 1835-2000* by L. Mara Dodge, Northern University Press, 2006, pp. 342.

*Mad or Bad?: Race, Class, Gender, and Mental Disorder in the Criminal Justice System* by Melissa Thompson, LFB Scholarly Publishing, pp. 197.

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As law professor Michelle Alexander has eloquently stated in her acclaimed book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness* (2010), we live in times that vastly over incarcerate people of color, and as the term Jim Crow suggests, particularly people of African descent. Scholars and activists have taken note and in the

following some recent work on historical and contemporary perspectives of people incarcerated in women's prisons will be discussed. My review is informed by a penal abolition worldview, which ultimately demands a transformative justice approach worldwide. The texts here under review are limited to a critique of the current carceral system, in particular the United States' mass incarceration approach, rather than proposing views of a post-penal society. However, several editors and authors are guided by abolitionist demands and politics. Some texts highlight the need for restorative justice, which is a more reform-minded approach, rather than abolitionist because it does not demand a complete transformation of the punishment industry and its entanglement with capitalism, imperialism, warfare, educational and social services, to name a few. However, I should note that abolitionism used to be on the radical fringe of the prison reform movement, and given that quite a few authors cited Critical Resistance, Justice Now, and other abolitionist groups, I am encouraged that it has now found serious traction, so that there will be a time that indeed "another world is possible," namely without prisons as institutions of social control of LGBTQ, youth, and poor folks, especially poor people of color (with or without papers).

To begin with **Victoria Law's** monograph, I argue that Law's book is a fine addition to the growing literature on prison abolition. It also addresses a void in abolitionism, since not much attention has been paid to women prisoners and their ability to organize and resist oppressive conditions—exceptions are the studies of feminist scholar-activists (e.g., Faith, 1992; Cook and Davies, 1999; Diaz-Cotto, 1996; and Diaz-Cotto, 2006). Author-activist, Victoria Law, herself had run-ins with the law, for gang-related initiation with armed robbery, notes with some irony: "Because it was my first arrest—and probably because 16-year-old Chinese girls who get straight As in school did not seem particularly menacing—I was eventually let off with probation" (p.1). But soon enough she began solidarity visits to friends incarcerated at one of the largest jails in the world, Rikers Island, New York City. Even though women are the fastest growing group of criminalized people in the US such that they represent nine percent of the prison population (in stark contrast to the prison statistics of all other countries which tend to be at six percent or less), their voices continue to be marginalized in the literature.

Yet, there are women prisoners who resist in similar fashions as men do, some turn into jailhouse lawyers (as attested to by Mumia Abu-Jamal's

latest brilliant book *Jailhouse Lawyers*, 2009). Law argues, as does Abu-Jamal, that those women who take on the prison system through legal recourse face “extreme levels of administrative harassment,” especially beatings and solitary confinement but also having their personal possessions trashed by vengeful guards (pp. 6 and passim). Law debunks skillfully the myth that women prisoners are passive victims of their own fate and don’t organize. Who has heard of “the August Rebellion” of 1974 (Bedford Hills, NY)? Or, the “Christmas riot” of 1975 (in an unnamed California prison), and more recently a large uprising at the Lexington, Kentucky federal prison in 1992 (p.11-12)? I appreciate that Law includes educational programs organized by prisoners as acts of resisting the system because most articles and books written on education is done so by outside educators. Law quotes Kathy Boudin who gives a succinct ideology critique of the modality of the prison: enforcing dependency, obedience and control, which are all challenged by literacy programs among others (p.15 and more on the subversive aspects of teaching writing, below).

A particularly fascinating chapter is “Breaking the silence: Incarcerated women’s media” where Law shows that she has engaged in “subversive” research in unearthing women’s writings about horrendous prison conditions. One enterprising woman, Yriada L. Guanipa, wrote to the mainstream media to hear concerns of women prisoners without luck, but she was able to utilize email (instituted in the federal system in 2005) and her grievances were reposted on a weblog titled “Prison Talk On-Line” which became a popular site. However, repercussions of critiquing the system followed quickly by threats of rescinding her furlough to be with her children (pp. 127-39). Law writes that it is mostly the radical feminist press that has been perceptive to publishing women prisoners’ narratives such as *off our backs* and *Sojourner* (which also gave free subscriptions up to 1,000 prisoners till it ceased production in 2002), giving also voice to lesbians and trans persons. Women who self-publish zines in prison often feel stymied by the usual censoring eyes, and in response women prisoners of Coffee Creek Correctional Facility in Oregon collaborated with outside supporters, including Law, producing the zine *Tenacious: Writings from Women in Prison*, which discusses prison conditions, assaults by guards and has prompted public responses—and, of course, the dreaded prohibition of receiving the zine on the inside (pp. 135-6).

Finally, Law brings into view the invisible, undocumented or asylum-seeking women who are in detention centers. She chronicles the courage of women speaking out against rape despite the further threats of deportation—a veritable death sentence. Much of what happens to the women or girls is unnoticed by the prison activist movement, because it has practically no ties with groups supporting asylum seekers and refugees, the latter often have naïve notions about desert and punishment, which is corrected by Law: “regardless of the reason she is being held, no person should be subjected to sexual harassment and assault, substandard health care and the other atrocities regularly found in prisons and detention centers” (p. 158).

Law also movingly describes women claiming their power while participating in educational activities and taking part in work stoppages, as well as protesting horrid health care conditions. The lack of health care and the horror of shackling a woman giving birth have made it into the mainstream reports of moral outrage, however, we don’t read about prisoners losing custody for their children because of another well-meaning federal reform measure: ASFA (Adoption and Safe Families Act). Law describes the cruelty of lack of visitation rights with loved ones and hunger strikes engaged to demand placement in a prison closer to home. Here I’d like to note that it would have been helpful to bring in international comparisons and the conventions on the rights of prisoners: the right to privacy (and refusing male guards in shower areas, etc.) as well as the right to be placed in a prison in vicinity of one’s home. Shackling while being ill or giving birth, too, would be considered a human rights violation. After all, the only right the prisoner is supposed to forfeit is her freedom of movement.

Law’s book is a useful resource for prison activists and for feminists who have not yet engaged with issues faced by millions of women, men, and trans people in the U.S., which has highest incarceration rate in the world. The book gives a critical account of so-called reforms such as the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA, 2003), which is the government’s first law addressing prison rape. PREA’s focus has been on prisoners’ male-to-male rape. As far as the women prisoners interviewed are concerned, it has done nothing to stop guards from sexual assaults on women; to the contrary, it has intensified the punishment meted out against women prisoners’ intimate relationships, including “earning” sex offender status upon release (pp.69-71). Law’s book serves as an excellent primer for students, including high school students, on the

matter of treating prisoners as women first. In a nation that is bent on condemning a vast segment of society to harsh punishment and long sentences, including death, it is important to hear from an activist who encourages us to think of incarceration as a viable strategy to pursue. Law presents us with a rich resource section, including a glossary of legal terms, prisoners' support organizations and further readings.

Among the books of Victoria Law's reading list is **Julia Sudbury's** edited collection, *Global Lockdown*. While Law prides herself to write in an accessible way, she chides, somewhat unjustly, that Sudbury's book lacks the clarity to engage the average reader. This may be true of the introduction, which may be directed towards the expert who already has a sufficient grounding in prison studies. I find Sudbury's penal abolitionist feminist framework presented in her concise introduction is to date quite unmatched in addition to its ambitious global reach. Most of the feminist anthologies mentioned in this review essay present a traditional reform-minded or restorative-justice oriented rather than an abolitionist model and they focus solely on the U.S. carceral complex. Sudbury, by contrast, calls for activists who are involved in a critique of neoliberalism to join with anti-prison activists, and she notes it's not surprising that women of color tend to be in the forefront of the antiprison and antiglobalization praxis. The global "war on drugs" has become a war against women of color. The world over the incarceration rates of women in conflict with the law are on the rise, and she calls on social science researchers to begin looking at this issue from a macroscopic perspective on oppression, rather than from a microscopic, individualized viewpoint that is myopic about citizenship, race and class considerations in the criminalization of women.

I have found that my college students respond to Sudbury's anthology very well; it requires, however, that students do quite a bit of background intercultural work, so that they can discuss the narratives and analyses presented in a more competent way. For instance, the chapters on Palestinian women political prisoners (Bayour) and on Pakistan's *Zina* ordinance (Khan) presuppose knowledge of geopolitics and a nuanced understanding of local histories, including a modicum of information of Islam and Islamophobia that I often find quite wanting in U.S. students. To be sure, Khan's article is a favorite for students, but I worry that their zeal of "speaking for" the oppressed amounts to a problematic exoticization of Pakistani traditions (cf. Narayan, 1997). In addition, Julia (Sudbury) Oparah would be the first to acknowledge that the focus

on women's walled experiences is too limited and does not account for trans or gender nonconforming politics of location. However, overall the personal stories of survival drawing on indigenous, Latino, African, and Asian voices are powerful and make for compelling class discussions in women's studies and criminology courses.

**Michelle Lawston and Ashley Lucas's** anthology *Razor Wire Women* also makes a fine, compassionate contribution to the growing genre of U.S. based prison activist movement. It presents a diversity of voices, fronting powerful prisoners' artwork, testimonials, and poetry in the beginning of each section. The three sections focus on the role of families and meaning of home; sexuality, health, and abuse; education and the role of the arts. It transcends traditional racial binaries (Black versus white) by including narratives from and about immigrant women, in particular Mexican and Vietnamese women (Escobar; Glassey-Tranguyen), as well as girls (section I), trans women and gender nonconforming women (Heidenreich; Sudbury). While presenting a good deal of activist perspectives, mostly from California based prisoners and supporters, the book also incorporates research and policy studies on Hawaiian youth (Bilsky & Chesney-Lind), on mental health (Moe), and how policies shape the role of motherhood (Bloom & Brown). Martha Escobar's essay is a chilling reminder of the global reach of prison nation USA. Mexican mothers imprisoned in the U.S. may find their families in Mexico denied the right to unite with their children because the Mexican social services agency colludes with the white middle class demands of the U.S. social services and child protective agency when making home inspections. Escobar points to the transnational reach and punitive effect of ASFA (American Safe Families Act) and the difficulties of families of incarcerated parents to navigate the system and bring their children home.

The trope of "razor wire women" depicts a crossing of inside/outside barriers and to be in solidarity "with women on both sides of prison walls, understanding intimately how the razor wire binds us." Furthermore, it describes "those women who experience the criminal justice system in ways that shape their lives profoundly" (p. 7). The editors' hope is to move to solutions that provide alternatives to incarceration (ATI). While this may sound abolitionist, ATI programs often are attached to county offices of parole and probation and may actually lead to even more policing and eventual detention because they are not conceived of as true alternatives. A case in point: Bilsky and

Chesney-Lind's chapter investigates the impact of ATI for youth in Hawai'i and lament the overrepresentation of indigenous youth in the criminal justice system (whereas white children are underrepresented); they champion the Annie E. Casey's Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) which seeks to reduce youth detentions in particular in secure facilities and JDAI has been implemented in Hawai'i since 2008. It has now been shown that the major beneficiaries of JDAI have been white youth, but youth of color have even seen worse rates of carceral control in some jurisdictions (Coleman, 2011). Clearly, a reform-minded penal agenda that does not address systemic racism, poverty, and lack of access to meaningful education, will not make a dent in the current rates of mass incarceration or the New Jim Crow (Alexander, 2010). However, as long as there are prisons, advocacy for human rights is clearly necessary. The testimonies on the dangerous status of health care, prisoners' abuse, especially of trans women in men's prisons, and sexual assault echo those in all other books discussed in this review. Linda Heidenreich notes that so far only New York State has separate housing "for gay, transgender, and transsexual inmates" (p. 161). Another abolitionist caveat: as the classic *Instead of Prisons: A Handbook for Abolitionists* (1976) explained "inmate" is a dishonest description for a caged person, a prisoner. Julia Sudbury adds that "women in prison" describes insufficiently the experiences of persons incarcerated in women's prisons and calls for an approach that is "an 'antiracist genderqueer antiprison framework' to signal a feminist praxis that actively challenges the state's power to define and police gender while simultaneously challenging the racialized build-up of the prison-industrial complex" (p. 180). Finally, resistance is engendered through writing in the old-fashioned newspaper, as chronicled in Eleanor Novek's chapter. She considers it part of the outsider journalism genre, quite apt a description, given that this practice had legitimacy only for a few years, before the authorities shut it down.

*Razor Wire Women* is an accessibly written anthology that will engage prison activists and complement undergraduate course work in a variety of disciplines including the arts, women's studies, criminology, anthropology, and sociology.

Continuing the critique of the prison industrial complex (PIC) and of its terrifying effects on incarcerated women is accomplished by the editorial team of **Rickie Solinger, Paula Johnson, Martha Raimon, Tina Reynolds, and Ruby Tapia** of *Interrupted Lives*. It is another important

anthology devoted to the lives of people incarcerated in women's prisons. Involving 82 writers the book is vast in scope and testimonies including 44 writers who have (or had) first-hand experience with imprisonment, in addition to publishing government documents, including a UN report. It is an enormous feat in scale alone, and it should be on everybody's reading list who wishes to get a good overview of the important issues and a sense of the diversity of lived experiences of women who are or were formerly incarcerated. The editors set out with an abolitionist agenda, beginning with activist-scholar Julia Sudbury's lead article on globalization, PIC, and its impact on women of color. She concludes her article with articulating an abolitionist future, which would involve stopping prison expansion, decarceration and eventual excarceration, and promoting community recovery and accountability, which focuses "on healing and transformation rather than punishment and imprisonment" (p. 22). Given the large amount of contributions, the editors concede that a cohesive thread of abolitionism was not possible. Contributors include scholars, activists, artists, many of them having experienced prison, and also six lawyers (rather unusual for an interdisciplinary book project of this nature) who "render images of the prison that, together, train our vision toward what, exactly, it systematically interrupts: justice, humanity, life" (p. 2). Many of the section themes echo those of the *Razor Wire Women*, including motherhood, sexuality, health care access, and creative education; the book also includes photos of prisoners and poetry by prisoners. Other themes covered here are death row and a lengthy section discussing life after imprisonment, i.e., the continuing stigmatization and legal discrimination that follows the life of somebody marked "felon." Numerous disruptions of prison repression are presented by children's heartfelt accounts of mourning their involuntarily absent mothers and being enveloped in the prison of foster care; and by offering a children's bill of rights contesting the ideology of ASFA, i.e. the meaning of what is in the best interest of the child. There is also a young mother's bill of rights, which is modest in its demands, e.g., having the right not being handcuffed and shackled during labor (why would it be ever OK to shackle a pregnant woman?). Gender variant and trans women's rights are also mentioned, including a "best practice" ordinance from Washington State. I learnt much from Cynthia Chandler's critique of gender responsive prisons (such as the LGBT ordinance). Chandler who works with the abolitionist group Justice Now and included in her brief



essay a conversation with Loretta Ross, a noted reproductive justice activist, who also objects to incarcerating of women on the grounds that their reproductive rights are violated. Chandler also echoes Mara Dodge's cautionary tale (see below) that we have seen gender responsive prisons in the past, called reformatories which tended to be reserved for white women who committed "status offenses like adultery or fornication" (p. 337). So here's the tension—should we task lawyers to pry open prisons to UN inspectors and implement a modicum of humanitarianism and rehabilitation services or rally only for demands of shutting down all prisons, in particular women's and girls' prisons? *Interrupted Life* does not give an answer to this vexing question, and instead lets the reader ponder how to get involved in finding alternative solutions.

Dealing with the question of rehabilitation with a sympathetic nod towards an abolitionist pursuit of justice is **Megan Sweeney's** masterful and award winning study of reading practices of imprisoned women she interviewed in three different states, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Ohio. Sweeney led 241 individual interviews and 51 group discussions with women. Sweeney invited 94 women with a self-identified 8<sup>th</sup> grade education. They chose their own pseudonym as well as selected books that dealt with urban crime fiction (which tends to be forbidden reading in prisons), self-help or victimization themes. She did not ask, however, to disclose their sentences, which, on the other hand, are revealed in the eleven self-portraits of **Wally Lamb's and the Women of York Correctional Institution's book**. Lamb's collection is actually a focus of a reading discussion of Sweeney's participants, some of whom quite sharply reject the rhetoric of victimization and what they identify as a lack of agency and accomplishments—even though Lamb notes the authors' good deeds in prison and post-release. But blaming their convict status on their violent upbringings is read as an "excuse" for taking responsibility and all stories blend together; in Sweeney's own words: "when read in succession, they can assume a serial or commodified quality that threatens to reify their subjects as undifferentiated victims" (p. 101). Still, many of Sweeney's participants identify with the York women and find their stories uplifting.

Perhaps unwittingly, Lamb seems to lean towards a restorative, if not abolitionist paradigm, given what the women writers have taught him over the years that he worked with them: "We are a paradoxical nation, enormously charitable and stubbornly unforgiving. We have called into

existence the prisons we wanted. I am less and less convinced they are the prisons we need” (p. 17). Nevertheless, Lamb’s collection is wedded to the uncritical therapeutic cum disciplinary model. Sweeney’s book by contrast gives a careful exposé of the genealogy of moral uplift education through bibliotherapy reserved for white prisoners and how the Black Women’s Club movement contributed reading materials to Black prisoners to uplift the race (p. 22-23). Sweeney’s analysis counters what Weil Davis marks as the pitfalls of therapeutic and confessional teaching in *Razor Wire Women*, while Lamb’s pedagogy rides on it, taking his cue for the book title from a popular gospel song. Sweeney’s title “Reading is My Window” is inspired by a participant reader, Denise, and while reading creates solace and a modicum of refuge and timelessness, Sweeney is quick to critique the ideology of rehabilitation—prisons are repressive institutions, and the women imprisoned intellectuals find meaning in their lives despite of imprisonment. In my favorite chapter “To Set the Captives Free,” the African American poet Solo captures it beautifully in a poem on freedom:

I am free!

For me, freedom has been an *evolution* not a *revolution*. See, my freedom was gained through years of self inflicted struggle . . .

For me, freedom came and slept with me, it held me close during the midnight of my existence, and baptized me with my own tears until I was thoroughly cleansed of inferiority, low esteem, and self loathing (Sweeney, pp. 209-10).

Lamb’s book may be stocked in several on the reading list of many women’s prisons (as well as Oprah’s book club), whereas Sweeney’s critical interventions discussion of the and other subversive practices as well as discussion of abolition will be lucky to find her book in prisons’ “Underground Book Railroad”—an apt name for circulating subversive books and pamphlets. Sweeney also includes prison policy discussions and a resource list of organizations which donate books to prisoners—sadly, none of the prisoners she works with can utilize their services since the prisons in all three states only allow books sent from publishers.

Both Sweeney and Lamb’s books not only bring much needed attention of women’s agency and intellectual ability, and they will inspire a new generation of folks who wish to teach literature or writing in prisons, and if that contributes to—in the words of a former student of mine—

breaking down the psychic and physical walls that separate millions of prisoners from those of us, formerly or not-yet incarcerated by the state. Taking us back in time is **Mara Dodge's** magnificent historical treatise "*Whores and Thieves of the Worst Kind*": *A Study of Women, Crime, and Prisons, 1835-2000*. It explores the daily life of warders, civilian staff, and female prisoners at Joliet and Alton penitentiaries and Dwight Correctional Center, Illinois. Dodge's careful archival work gives prison scholars and activists insights about the dangers of dabbling with prison reform. What looks like a good idea, may have bad repercussions, as we have seen in articles devoted on parental termination rights, thanks to ASFA. As the Illinois case study makes clear, there's a gendered double standard about the way women's delinquencies are disciplined in the courts and in prison. Dodge follows penitentiary and reformatory narratives concerning "wayward women" from inception in the 1830s to about 1970 with the official abandonment of the reformatory-style reserved for women. Her work masterfully shows how punishment is socially constructed since it is disproportionately meted out against Black, poor, and socially disadvantaged women and girls. The reform movement inspired cottage system at Dwight exuded ideals of domesticity and tranquility, yet Dodge's archival work shows that far from succeeding to inculcate lady-like behavior in their charges, warders and superintendents tended to create a repressive atmosphere of hyper-vigilance and total psychological control. Dodge, like Law, makes the case for uppity—especially Black—prisoners who resisted repression, which intensified during the 1950s's obsession with lesbianism, actually considered the greatest threat to the prison rules (p. 221). Even as early as in 1845, prison inspectors noted that "one female prisoner is of more trouble than twenty male prisoners" (p. 29). Against the prevailing attitudes that women are not real prisoners and women's prisons are more comfortable than the male counterpart dungeons, records show that women tend to face harsher penalties—especially in the age of the War on Drugs—but also for infractions that male prisoners would never face sanctions, especially loss of good time, and their mobility also tended to be more restricted than that of men's (pp. 230-4).

In the 1970s a new wave of reforms swept the prison system, with the result that at Dwight and elsewhere women warders and superintendents were replaced with male correctional officers and superintendents, and many of the women's facilities went again co-ed, as women were first incarcerated in the attic or basement of men's prisons. As Dodge notes,

female prisoners tend to have endured histories of domestic and sexual violence before entering prisons; such trauma is compounded by the threat of sexual violence and coercion by male prisoners and staff, exposed by Human Rights Watch's 1996 report *All too familiar: Sexual Abuse of Women in U.S. Women's Prisons*, and singling out Illinois as one of the five states with the worst record (Dodge, p. 256). This has led many prison reformers to demand gender-responsive service. It can be a platform for meaningful improvements in women's prison, and important services given to transgender prisoners. On the other hand, it can be a way of *increasing* penalties. Whereas a pregnant mother might be released early from prison, a prison with excellent pre- and postnatal arrangements might sway the parole board to retain the prisoner to give birth in prison. Dodge (2006) makes a historical point by noting, that 19th Century judges in Illinois were reluctant to send pregnant women to prison, not due to humanitarian concerns, but due to cost-benefit accounting: pregnant women and the subsequent prison care (crèche) of babies would not be cost-effective in a prison environment that was supposed to extract as much menial labor from the convicts as it could (pp. 31-2). In fact, there's hardly a bleaker picture given on gender disparities than from a chaplain in 1930: "To be a *male* convict in this prison would be quite tolerable; but to be a *female* convict, for a protracted period, would be worse than death" (p. 14).

Clearly, at stake is that the modern penitentiary was designed to fit the needs (if any) of adult men. And some 19<sup>th</sup> Century women reformers such as Elizabeth Fry may not have understood that. Fry was beholden to the cult of true womanhood ideal and thus blamed the victim, rather than the male-oriented standard of housing prisoners. She heaped much blame on the loud, unkempt women prisoners, rather than the material conditions they survived in. However Fry would have been aghast at "gender-neutral" accommodations where male guards are allowed to supervise female prisoners in shower areas in because of "equal opportunity" provisions (contrary to the UN convention on the treatment of prisoners). By the 1970s, gender-specific prisons, inspired by disciplinary regime of reformatories, vanished and "co-educational" prisons appeared (p. 21). So it is ironic that gender-specificity is demanded again; my worry is that if one operates under a *reform* paradigm, one is always inclined to make excuses for sending women (and men) to prison and also for long stretches of time, because it will be a tolerable experience.

Gender-responsive sentencing is a concern of **Melissa Thompson's** provocatively titled monograph *Mad or Bad?* Her studies of psychiatric labeling, sentencing, and uses of the insanity defense in trials show that a transinstitutionalization, rather than a "deinstitutionalization" has taken place since the wholesale closing of hospitals or asylums for patients who were confined for mental illness in the United States (p. 6). Women tend to be labeled as mentally disabled (she still uses the problematic label of mental retardation) when booked and sentenced for committing gender atypical offenses whereas men's offenses tend to be "normalized" and thus facing harsher sentences that do not involve psychiatric intervention. On the gender spectrum, men are socialized to show aggression towards others ("externalizing disorders") whereas women are socialized to internalize their disorders, e.g., through depression and panic attacks (pp. 27-28). Thompson's research shows that African Americans in particular face bias in the courts, as their behavior will be construed as fitting the normal range of criminal behavior rather than as being labeled as "bizarre" (p. 59). So, it may be the case that Black Americans do not receive proper medical intervention, and even if it is the case that they are labeled as suffering from a mental disorder, they still face harsher penalties than others, in particular white offenders. "The fact that African Americans do not appear to receive mental health treatment—even when there is clear evidence that they need it—suggests that these individuals will have a more difficult time in prison, and also once they are released from prison" (p. 159). Sadly, Thompson's conclusion is corroborated by the many testimonies of Black women in the books reviewed here. What is confusing at times in Thompson's analysis is the separation of demographic variables such as gender and race. She notes that women face lesser charges than African Americans—where does that leave Black women? Is it the case that whenever she mentions African Americans who face the racist label of criminal, Thompson actually means Black man, as in "criminalblackman" (Russell 1988)?

All of the authors discussed in this review present a more complex portrayal of people incarcerated in prisons and particularly, in women's prisons. I think it can no longer be said that women and girls are understudied; however, what is missing from the record are sustained autoethnographies by transgender and gender non-conforming incarcerated persons. As Kathy Boudin notes in her Foreword to *Razor Wire Women*, it is important to neither victimize nor demonize but to

reckon with the fact that by breaking the inside/outside walls “[i]t places the individual with agency inside a set of social conditions created precisely to deny such agency” (xix).

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