

PART I

The Theatrics of State Terror

We are all trapped in the jaws of something shaking the life out of us.

J. Edgar Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire*

“We are trapped in the jaws of something shaking the life out of us.” With these words from his historical novel, *Philadelphia Fire*, John Edgar Wideman conveys a sense of what it means to be caught out on stage, vulnerable at the point of having one’s life taken, shaken out, by what I have term “the theatrics of state terror.” Wideman’s discernment carries rage and lament. It is full of frustration and fear. There is consternation and a vexed wrestling with the entrapping “jaws” that belong . . . well, to “something.” State terror’s theatrics are like that, unleashing forces that brutalize its victims while those sinister forces’ point of origin can seem elusive, hard to identify, complexly dispersed, only nameable as a “something.”

Lockdown America, as that triadic structure of police violence, mass incarceration and the death penalty, is one key assemblage of governing forces, of the state’s “jaws.” Theorists term it “carceral violence.” Its force targets vulnerable populations, sometimes

displayed though, again, in elusive and unpredictable ways. Indeed, there are agents responsible and nameable. But Lockdown America as state terror can often be felt to taunt, to play with its victims as they are caught up in a relentless mesh of carceral violence. Thus, even though many have their very material life-energies drained out, there persists a certain sense of unreality amidst it all, a sense of confronting, again, that “something.”

A Bombing

Wideman gives his readers a front-row seat to state terror, displaying it in his novel that deals with the events surrounding the 1985 dropping of a military explosive device by Philadelphia officials from a helicopter, bombing the home of the MOVE Organization, a naturalist and black liberation community. For years, MOVE had challenged authorities in Philadelphia for systemic abuses by police and other government officials, even displaying arms at one point in self-defense, that had resulted in massive and disproportionate armed assault by officials already in 1978. The 1985 bombing caused a fire that was allowed to run out of control, destroying over sixty homes in West Philadelphia, a largely black community, killing eleven people in the bombed house, five of whom were children. The officials' attack laid waste to innocent life, and showed a callous disregard for an entire neighborhood.

No officials have been held criminally accountable for the loss of life that day. Civil suits found fault with officials, but criminal negligence was not assigned. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania took no steps against Philadelphia officials, nor did federal authorities. So, who was responsible for the state of things in the bombing of MOVE in Philadelphia of 1985? Many, if not most astute and fair observers of the horror of that day, would find inconceivable that officials did not overstep the bounds of both law and wisdom, as

they tried to finish off a vendetta against a politically active naturalist group from a poor community that officials could only see as meddlesome to the city because it challenged their policies and power. Interviewed about the incident in 2005, the lawyer who chaired the probe into what happened, William H. Brown III, intoned, “It makes no sense, even today. Every time I think about it, the angrier I get. There was no reason to drop that bomb. Whatever people thought about the MOVE adults, there were children inside that house.”¹

An accounting is still needed and the holding of officials accountable is still required as well. As the whole event stands—as Brown said, “It makes no sense”—there is also something bigger here. So Wideman writes, “We are trapped in the jaws of something shaking the life out of us.” What is this bigger “something”?

The State

We are led then to wrestle with “the jaws,” which I take as signaling the power of *the state*. The book discusses, throughout, the state and state terror. What do we mean by this term? The state, I suggest, is not to be identified with national, regional, or local authorities, even if they are each essential to state terror’s play and power. Nor is the state that terrorizes to be identified solely with the U.S. nation. To be sure, the structures and history of the U.S. government and nation are also crucial to that state terror. They are responsible agents. But there is something bigger pervading there actions, animating them, and which they are serving, especially through the triadic structure of Lockdown America. “The state” names that something.

1. Larry Eichel, “The MOVE Disaster,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 8, 2005, <http://www.religionnewsblog.com/11182/the-move-disaster-may-13-1985>, accessed June 20, 2015.

Wendy Brown's reminder in *The States of Injury* delineates the state in terms that respect the elusive "something" that is state power. The state, she writes, "is not a thing, system, or subject, but a significantly unbounded terrain of powers and techniques, an ensemble of discourses, rules and practices, cohabiting in limited, tension-ridden, often contradictory relation with one another."² I affirm Brown's pointing to this "unbounded terrain" and "ensemble," but add a qualification: amid the ensemble, there are still identifiable entities such as "nations" (the United States, Guatemala, the Congo, et al.) with distinctive histories and social systems that carry force and shape lives. Often key state agents and officials (governors, mayors, police officers, security personnel) can be identified as practitioners of state violence. Further, there are structures of domination, again with histories and social patterns that limit many while entitling others in unfair ways (white supremacy, gender and sexual injustice, class exploitation, nationalisms, et al.). As we discuss the state violence of Lockdown America, ways must be found to acknowledge the elusiveness of state power as Brown's language of "unbounded terrain" signals, without dissolving the very real workings of entities—systems, nations, city officials, and so on—which have agency, control, and often are destructive.

The "United States," for example, as I conceive it in this book, is a nation that is, to be sure, discernible as a structuring force. Its national structures, though, should not be seen as fully identical to that of "the state." It is embedded in "the state," taking this latter as a larger matrix of power, often transnational in character. As Saskia Sassen writes, the U.S., for all of its distinctiveness participates in an "inter-state system," being a "building block" of that whole with other nations, even though with its command of global military force and system of

2. Wendy Brown, *States of Injury* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 17.

bases it has undue influence on that inter-state system. At the same time, however, the United States, privileged as it is (undeniably and often brutally) is also “profoundly altered from the inside out” by its belonging to that inter-state system.³

Consider the creation of poverty in the U.S., for example. It is not only a result of interior national dynamics, with a U.S. ruling class, the “one percent,” exploiting a group of the “99 percent.” Indeed, that class is an essential part of the trauma. Just as importantly, though, this interior exploitation within the U.S. takes place within a global set of dynamics, of economic exploitation and impoverishment of poorer communities the world over, the full process of which exists outside of the U.S. Further, U.S. decision-makers make their decisions in relation to a transnational corporate elite that structures the global, inter-state economic and political system. This system—often referenced as “globalization, or the “free market”—has reasserted itself today as what many scholars term “neoliberalism,” i.e. the “reassertion of liberal political economic beliefs of the 19th century in the contemporary era.”⁴ Because U.S. decision-makers play such a strong role in forming today’s market ideology of neoliberalism in guiding its policy and in defending it with its military powers, this neoliberalism is often also referenced as “the Washington consensus.” A guiding premise of the astute *Routledge Handbook of Poverty in the United States* (2015) is that it is crucial to understand transnational patterns of neoliberal “globalization” economies abroad in order to understand the impoverishment of communities within the U.S.⁵ Again, this militarily-backed economic arrangement operates from

3. Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages*. Updated edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 377.

4. María Vidal de Haymes, Stephen Nathan Haymes, and Michael Lloyd, “Introduction,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Poverty in the United States*, ed. Stephen Nathan Haymes, María Vidal de Haymes, and Reuben Jonathan Miller (New York: Routledge, 2015), 7.

5. Haymes, Haymes and Miller, *Routledge Handbook of Poverty*, 1–6.

the outside but shapes the interior structures of the U.S., thus influencing the everyday economic life of its citizens and residents.⁶ The power of “the state” emanates both from the U.S. nation and also through the relations by which it is embedded in global, transnational networks of power.

Lockdown America and Structures of Domination

So, powers of “the state” operate within the nation *and* from outside it. Within the nation, though, the interests of elites are enforced by various structures and traditions of domination. Lockdown America is one of these structures, a triadic one, as we have seen, featuring police violence, mass incarceration, and the death penalty. As a structure it orchestrates not only the interests of the transnational corporate elite in the U.S., but also U.S. traditions of white racism, and gender/sexual injustice that take a major toll on women and on queer and trans persons and others of non-conforming sexualities. Lockdown America, then, operates at the juncture of the nation’s embeddedness in global state power, on the one hand, and these structures of domination, on the other. In other words, Lockdown America is an assemblage of powers that orchestrates this interplay of the U.S. as a nation embedded in global state structures *with* the various structures of domination that play throughout the nation in our current period. White racism is one of these “structures of domination.” It is deployed by Lockdown America for servicing the state’s dominance at home and also abroad. This is why one theorist, Malini Johar Schueller, in thinking about just the prisons in Lockdown America, reminds her readers that U.S. mass incarceration can be viewed as “a technology where racism and imperialism intersect.”⁷ The “way of the cross” in this book will be a way through

6. Pamela Blackmon, “Beyond Coincidence: How Neoliberal Policy Initiatives in the IMF and World Bank Affected US Poverty Levels,” in *Routledge Handbook of Poverty*, 11-18.

this Lockdown America as a key assemblage of the state's structures of domination. Now, what of this state as generating something I term *terror*?

Terror

Whether considering action of the United States abroad or on its home front, I presume two closely related spheres of meaning for this notion of "terror." This word means to put in a state of fright (Latin *terror*, from *terrere*, "to frighten," "built on the root," *tres-*, "to tremble"). The mix of fear and trembling usually immobilizes, works severe injury, or creates lasting disintegration or death on targeted bodies.⁸ In the first, more usual meaning of the term, terror breaks upon the terrorized as "shock and awe." 9/11 for many U.S. citizens, especially as media-enhanced, was terror in this sense. Abroad, in its wars, the U.S. also uses such terror. U.S. generals openly announce "shock and awe" as a deliberate tactic of U.S. forces, promoting disorientation for control of peoples and their lands. Whether this works and how best to deploy it is often debated.⁹ Nevertheless, it was announced as the strategy U.S. generals would deploy at the start of their 2003 military assault and occupation of Iraq.¹⁰ On the U.S. national scene, too, U.S. police forces, which are increasingly militarized, depend upon "shock and awe," as when they light up the urban night-time skies to pursue a single suspect, to round up

7. Malini Johar Schueller, *Locating Race: Global Sites of Post-Colonial Citizenship* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2009), 124.

8. See Rodríguez's theorization of terror in U.S. prison regimes as "immobilizing and disintegrating" of the confined in Dylan Rodríguez, *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Intellectuals and the US Prison Regime* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 145–84.

9. See for example, Richard Sanders, "The Myth of 'Shock and Awe,'" *The Telegraph*, March 19, 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/9933587/The-myth-of-shock-and-awe-why-the-Iraqi-invasion-was-a-disaster.html>, accessed June 20, 2015.

10. Eric Schmitt and Elizabeth Bumiller, "Top General Sees Plan to Shock Iraq into Surrendering," *New York Times*, March 5, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/05/international/middleeast/05IRAQ.html>, accessed June 20, 2015.

immigrants for deportation or detention, or, on still other occasions, to conduct night-time drug searches, rousting families from their beds, children included, to pursue those they deem suspects. In these processes not only are bodies wounded and innocent life snuffed out,¹¹ but also minds and hearts are traumatized, disoriented, rendered vulnerable and controllable. The use of “flash-bang grenades” increasingly used by police in confronting local protestors, as in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014, is a case in point. Not only do these grenades blind and completely disorient the targeted persons for a time, they also can maim and kill.¹²

There is a second sphere of meaning. Terror does not just work for the state in the mode of “shock and awe.” It also works in a mode I term “implanted terror.” Here, the fear of brutalization embeds itself more quietly, but forebodingly in the gut of targeted persons. State terror then is not only “shock and awe,” but often more a pinprick of wariness and dread, reminding one of state power, its dominance. In other words, the “shock and awe” is not a one-time event, nor is it meant to be. It is meant to have a lasting impact, to make the subordinated think always that the shock could be applied again. It is meant to leave one in an ongoing “state of shock. Whether as U.S. “warrior cops” geared-up in full-military dress and weaponry, as Israeli security forces dominating Palestinian Gaza, as U.S. forces occupying Iraqi lands, or as prison guards in U.S. prisons and detention centers—in all these cases, the shock and awe burst of brutality that occurs sporadically is meant to leave as its after-effect an implanted fear meant to quash dissent continuously. Protest

11. Ibid.

12. Abbie Nehring, “The ‘Non-Lethal’ Flash-Bang Grenades Used in Ferguson Can Actually be Quite Lethal,” *The Pacific Standard: The Science of Society*, August 2014, <http://www.psmag.com/navigation/nature-and-technology/non-lethal-flash-bang-grenades-used-ferguson-missouri-can-actually-quite-lethal-michael-brown-military-swat-police-89196>, accessed June 20, 2015.

and questioning of state authority are thereby discouraged. State terror thereby creates obedience in the bodies of citizens and residents by enlisting the tense stomach and the threatened sphincter as visceral reminders of the external threats. There, terror often abides, in hidden but lethal ways.

With this view of terror, I am in fundamental agreement with Dylan Rodríguez, who shows in his study of the U.S. prison regime that “terror” is not only an “exceptional and excessive” show of force, but also an internal gnawing sense of being subject to brutal rule, thus becoming a “facet of statecraft and social formation.”¹³ It is in this twofold sense as “shock and awe” *and* as ever-present “statecraft and social formation” that I will speak of “state terror” in the chapters that follow. Now, however, what of the notion of “theatrics?”

Theatrics

In a general sense, *theatrics* is simply the art of theater. More specifically, though, the term “theatrics” in this book refers to a complex interplay of public display and imagery, both of which are designed by the state to have particular effects on an audience, those ruled. Theatrics shape the affective lives of the ruled. As a mode of sensibility—i.e. sense-ability—this is no mere emotional manipulation. It impinges on everyday existence at those points where affect, material bodily life, social relations, and political power all interact. Families, for example, a primary group for social relations, are often structured—by public calendars, holidays, rituals of intimacy for youth formation, school habits, vocational training—in ways that revere state power. In these ways, such groups are audiences who also participate in the theatrical displays of state power. This happens especially when those ruled in a state, through a combination of

13. Rodríguez, *Forced Passages*, 147.

social conditioning and choice, are caught up in thrall to the state's nationalist rites and spectacles. Citizens' nationalism, expressed for example in the "superpatriotism" of post-9/11 U.S.A. facilitated a greater state rule over the lives of people. Amid media-stoked sustained fear, the state tightened its surveillance, rolled back constitutional rights, and connived with corporate powers to withdraw more funds from public service domains of government, all to the benefit of the already wealthy.¹⁴

Antonio Gramsci highlights this kind of participation of citizenry in their own rule, with his notion of state power's "hegemony." This is a theory of state power that depends upon the "consent" of the dominated, with the state often creating a public "common sense" among subordinate groups which often assume state power as advantageous for them.¹⁵ Thus, when in this book I write of a "theatrics of state terror," I will understand this as processes in which the dominated are often also drawn into supporting state power. I have argued elsewhere, following Jacques Rancière's work, that in this way the state rules, to a significant degree, by an "aesthetic regime," a way of ordering the sensible world for the ruled, in ways that maintain that rule by making it appear attractive to them, or at least as necessary, seemingly unquestionable.¹⁶ Various ideological domains (sports, entertainment, religion, patriotic feeling) can be sites wherein dominated peoples participate in, and even draw pleasure from, the orders that are structured to maintain their domination. It is the intention of the chapters in this Part One to show how "a theatrics of state terror" functions in this way.

14. Mark Lewis Taylor, *Religion, Politics and the Christian Right: Post-9/11 Powers and American Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 35-46.

15. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, trans. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 167-90 (esp. 170-71, 182-83).

16. Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Theological and the Political: On the Weight of the World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 167-78.

My emphasis on citizen participation in support of state is not to discount the brutal results of devastating economic conditions constructed by today's neoliberal policies. Nor do I deny that the ruled are often resistant to state power even when they seem accepting of it. Nor, again, should readers hear my discussion of the state's "theatrics" to imply an aestheticization of state rule, which would overlook the very political constraints that the state often places on the material lives of the poor. When I take up theatrics as a "*counter-theatrics* to state terror" in Part Two, this will include a call to an aesthetics of resistance, but only as a part of mobilizing social and political movements to redress political structural violence with the people's power of social movements. I set up no binary between the aesthetic and the material. The radical imagination catalyzes change in radical social movements.¹⁷

If, in this Part One, state power is portrayed in ways that make it appear as formidable and unchangeable as it is terrorizing—without any force to rival it—know that the two chapters of this Part are prelude to the book's Part Two, in which I lay out a "Counter-Theatrics to State Terror." There, in four concluding chapters and the Epilogue, I point to a counter-force already at work, a resistance, an alternative theatric, a new regime-making power of the people(s), a new materiality of social forces in which a revolutionary future can be sensed and known, on display, already on-the-way.

17. See Max Haiven and Alex Khasnabish, *The Radical Imagination: Social Movement Research in the Age of Austerity* (London: Zed Books, 2014), 149-55.

Lockdown America: A Theater of Terror

Short-term terror and revulsion are more powerful than long-term wisdom or self-interest.

Molly, prison educator, Rikers Island

Out of the Mouths of Babes and . . .

In my own church in Trenton, New Jersey, Tamika rose, with all of her thirteen years of age, to share a concern before the adults went to their “Prayers of the People” during Sunday morning worship. “We had a hard week in school,” she shared. “For two days we were on lockdown.” Her metaphor of *lockdown* was applied to her classmates’ being denied study hall privileges, but it is derived from the world of prison life. Today’s children and youth often use the metaphors of prison life to portray their own lives outside of prison. In 1995, when mass incarceration’s population had already reached 2 million, twelve-year-old Jeremiah discussed with educator, Jonathan Kozol,

the marked differences between his own poor community (Bronx, New York) and the more northerly and wealthier one of Riverdale.

“Life in Riverdale is opened up,” observed Jeremiah. “Where we live, it’s locked down.”¹ When asked by Kozol to elaborate Jeremiah and his friends pointed to city parks they can’t play in, schools without learning where the police teach them how to walk the halls, libraries they see but cannot go into because the buildings are locked and often falling apart, shopping malls they cannot get into because they cannot get past security vigilance, Bloomingdale stores in Manhattan at Christmastime that chase them away because they look African American, Latino/a, or poor.² Today, the links between young black, brown, or poor people and mass incarceration are all the more startling and fearsome. We now have the documented reality of the “school-to-prison pipeline” that often gives up on excellence of education and a professional future for America’s racialized poor, and then “tracks” them into jobs and communities where vulnerability enhances the likelihood of warehousing in prison.³

Then there is the homeless street poet whom Kozol encountered in a Bronx city park, who amid his own life of struggle dared language to interpret the whole metropolis: “I see New York as a symbolic city. These buildings are our concrete prisons piled up like Babel. A Satanic technology surrounds us. What we see is apparatus not humanity.”⁴ Whether from the mouths of youth or of homeless elders today’s prison-speak is not just the result of metaphorical dexterity or poetic license. It is rooted in the material, economic, political, and social conditions of our times. The Bronx children interviewed

1. Jonathan Kozol, *Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and the Conscience of a Nation* (New York: Crown, 1995), 32.

2. *Ibid.*, 32-39.

3. Crystal T. Laura, *Being Bad: My Baby Brother and the School-to-Prison Pipeline* (New York: Teachers College, 2014), 73.

4. Kozol, 2014), 73.

by Kozol, for example, live across from Rikers Island jail in the east River. Rikers is the largest penal institution in the world. With the Cook County Jail in Chicago, Rikers also trades back and forth the reputation of housing the largest community of the mentally ill in the U.S. At Rikers, one half to two-thirds of its caged people are African American or Latino (95 percent of all inmates in New York City jails and prisons are black or Latino).⁵ People in the Bronx community and elsewhere have family members cycling in and out, and know friends who have been, are, or will be there, as either inmates or employees.

In the mid-1990s, New York City was spending \$58,000 annually per adult inmate and \$70,000 for each juvenile at Rikers.⁶ In 2013, the annual cost per inmate was \$167,000.⁷ Over the last two decades this amounts to eight to ten times what the city spends on each child in its public schools.⁸ In trying to justify these expenditures, an educational administrator at Rikers (we will call her Molly) explains why this happens. Her blunt words speak more truth than perhaps she knew, and she points the way toward real understanding of why this country is building prisons and why its system of punishment works as it does. “Without this island [Rikers], the attractive lives some of us lead in the nice sections of New York would simply not be possible. If you want to get your outcasts out of sight, first you need a ghetto and then you need a prison to take pressure off the ghetto. . . . Short-term terror and revulsion are more powerful than

5. Jessie Daniels, “Structural Racism and a Tale of Two Islands: Manhattan and Rikers,” *Racism Review: Scholarship and Activism toward Racial Justice*, July 7, 2010, accessed June 20, 2015, <http://www.racismreview.com/blog/2010/07/07/structural-racism-and-a-tale-of-two-islands-manhattan-and-rikers/>.

6. Kozol, *Amazing Grace*, 73.

7. Rebecca Harshbarger, “Taxpayer cost of housing NYC prisoners last year: 7,000 per inmate,” *New York Post*, August 8, 2013, accessed June 20, 2015, <http://nypost.com/2013/08/23/taxpayer-cost-of-housing-nyc-prisoners-last-year-167000-per-inmate/>.

8. Stephanie Banchemo, “Price Per Student Drops,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 21, 2013, accessed July 1, 2015 <http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2013/05/21/public-spending-per-student-drops/>.

long-term wisdom or self-interest.”⁹ Molly’s words are not just those of some twisted staff member caught speaking out of place. They are, in fact, a window through which we can see the dynamics that drive our nation’s use of prisons and the state’s theatrics of terror. Quite frankly, this administrator reveals a hard truth: “short-term terror and revulsion” are now seen as necessary for control, essential to governance.

We see here the commitment to employ what terrorizes and repels, and does so powerfully, in order to have an effect of keeping certain groups in place or moving them from one realm to another. All of this is to commit those with governing powers to a show, a spectacle that displays power and creates motivating terror.

The very build-up of prisons, a veritable archipelago of incarcerating institutions in the United States¹⁰ that we name “mass incarceration,” is one sign of this theatrics of terror. To be sure, the buildup is usually justified in moral terms as a way to fight crime, to give just desserts to those who have violated the rules by which society decides to function. But the scale of buildup, what sociologist Loïc Wacquant terms “hyperincarceration,” which is unprecedented among world nations today in its combining of prison population numbers, recent rate of growth, disproportionate confinement of minorities, and startlingly harsh treatment—these together disclose the architecture by which state power disseminates terror.

Lockdown America: “Massifying,” Inequality and Big Business

The United States has become, in Christian Parenti’s words, not only “Lockdown America,” but also “Big House Nation.” Prison

9. Kozol, 159.

10. “U.S. Prison Proliferation 1900–2000,” Maps, *Prison Policy Initiative*, Bureau of Justice Statistics, map by Rose Heyer, 2005, accessed July 1, 2015, <http://www.prisonpolicy.org/atlas/proliferation1900-2000.html>.

populations have grown exponentially and have also become a “big business.” Even with some efforts at sentence reduction by some state and federal authorities, due to crises of overcrowding in prisons, the number of confined remains above the 2 million mark, fluctuating between the 2.2 and 2.3 million marks over the last decade. The U.S. still confines a higher proportion of its citizens than any other country, and no other nation, in law professor Michelle Alexander’s words, “incarcerates such an astonishing percentage of its racial or ethnic minorities.”¹¹

The number of those under some jurisdiction of the “carceral state” today approaches nearly 7.5 million if we consider those “doing time” in an outer prison of regimented life, under supervision of the court system, exposed to unannounced visits from parole and probation officers, mandatory urine tests, home detention, or the invisible tether of electronic bracelets. Again, recall, just since the late 1970s, the prison population has grown seven-fold,¹² constituting what the National Criminal Justice Commission in 1996 was already describing as “the largest and most frenetic correctional build-up of any country in the history of the world.”¹³ Investigative journalist Chris Hedges citing ACLU statistics notes that between 1970 and 2015 U.S. prisons have mushroomed by 700 percent.¹⁴ Years of watching statistics in federal and state prisons—and in jails and detention centers, as well as the probation and parole numbers—as I

11. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 8.

12. Bruce Western, *Prisons and Inequality in America* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation Publications, 2007), 3.

13. Stephen Donziger, ed., *The Real War on Crime: The Report of the National Criminal Justice Commission* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1996), 31.

14. Chris Hedges, “The Prison State of America,” *Truthdig: Drilling beneath the Headlines*, December 28, 2014, accessed June 20, 2015, http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/the_prison_state_of_america_20141228.

have creates a sense that state confinement of people is growing on more fronts and in modes that can hardly be captured in statistics.

But when we say “mass incarceration,” we must be aware that the “mass” does not refer simply to the large numbers. This is crucial because mass incarceration is not just a numbers game. Several sources suggest the U.S. prison population may in fact be ebbing, due, in part, to mandated releases in California as a result of overcrowding. These same sources, however, acknowledge that it is too early to tell how substantial the “ebbing” may be.¹⁵ Concern with numbers is the usual focus around the notion of “mass” in mass incarceration. As this book makes clear, the mass refers also to the way this large-scale process of confinement “massifies.” As massifying, hyperincarceration today concentrates particular people’s experiences and balkanizes targeted and vulnerable groups. Such concentration destroys the intricate fabric of relations within those groups that keep life human, with senses of opportunity and flourishing. This is what enables families and individuals to claim and feel that their lives are worth living.

As UCLA historian Sarah Haley notes, in earlier periods when the numbers of the confined were “only” in the tens of thousands, the prisons still concentrated, “massified,” the lives of targeted groups, particularly African Americans in post-slavery U.S.A. As Haley notes, this is why noted black women activists, in particular Selena Sloan Butler and Mary Church Terrell, fought tirelessly the forms of imprisonment in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth centuries. Concerning one of the progenitors of mass incarceration, the convict-leasing system—a form of penal labor after

15. For one discussion of this “ebbing,” see Jonathan Simon, *Mass Incarceration on Trial: A Remarkable Court Decision and the Future of Prison in America* (New York: The New Press, 2014), 1 and 173n1; and Marc Mauer, “The Changing Racial Dynamics of Women’s Incarceration,” in *The Sentencing Project*, February 2013, accessed June 20, 2015, http://sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/rd_Changing Racial Dynamics 2013.pdf.

“Emancipation” in 1865—Haley writes, “Mary Church Terrell identified the *existence* of convict leasing cages, not the *number* of them, as the condition that should mobilize black women to organize.”¹⁶ In spite of the lower number of the caged, that period was also one of “mass incarceration,” a hyperincarceration that targeted and controlled—“massified” in the sense of reducing to controllable mass—members of racialized and poor groups. Ultimately, those massified are subject to immobilization and disintegration.¹⁷

The historical origins of today’s enormously expanded mass incarceration system lie in the ways U.S. state power responded to black and other dissidents in the 1960s and 1970s. The frenzy of concern with such dissidents prompted key state leaders to target entire racialized communities from which dissidents might come. To be sure, these communities were “massified” before, in the sense of being targeted and subject to control by imprisonment prior to the 1960s/70s. But a post-civil rights era concern with dissidents of color powered up the state’s resort to widespread imprisonment. As historian Johanna Fernández writes in a study co-authored with political prisoner Abu-Jamal, “The deployment of hysteria around the issue of crime and the association of crime with black rebellion helped consolidate public support for legislation designed to suppress political dissent.”¹⁸ This set the stage for targeting racialized poor communities for detention and incarceration, and made spending and organizing for incarceration a national priority by both

16. Sarah Haley, “Abolition Dreams: Gender and Southern Carceral Resistance, 1890–1936.” Paper presented at the conference “Religion, Abolition and Mass Incarceration,” Cornell University, October 4, 2013.(emphasis added).

17. Dylan Rodríguez, *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2006), 69–70, 71, 72.

18. Mumia Abu-Jamal and Johanna Fernández, “Locking Up Black Dissidents and Punishing the Poor: The Roots of Mass Incarceration in the US,” *Socialism and Democracy* 28, no. 3 (November 2014): 5.

conservative and liberal politicians. According to University of California law professor Jonathan Simon, in California, for example, political prisoner George Jackson and “Jackson’s story” of emergence from poor black communities to violent resistance within prisons, “set the terms of the state’s prison-expansion policy in the 1980s and provided an icon of the convict-as-revolutionary-terrorist that would reset the national common sense about prisons and prisoners.”¹⁹

There are further implications of this notion of “massifying.” Not only are targeted, racialized groups “massified” for control with disintegrative consequences, but society as a whole also undergoes another form of massifying: a destructive balkanization of poorer groups made subordinate to an increasingly concentrated wealthy elite. Society becomes a mass of hierarchized units, more intensively bifurcated and locking people into its levels. Massification in this sense hardens inequality. Elites make money off of those incarcerated, and they take aim at maximizing the numbers they can profit from.²⁰ Prisoners are charged higher rates by phone corporations for calls to and from their families, and usually the families bear the brunt of price-gouging.²¹ If those on the outside want to send money to the confined, in many states now that money has to be deposited into prisoner accounts through a corporation called “J-Pay,” which then takes a hefty bite out of deposited sums.²² In the current ethos of privatization, the incarcerated are often soaked even further with fees for their own imprisonment, sometimes including their housing, also food, supplies, and even medical lab fees. Corporations also tax

19. Simon, *Mass Incarceration on Trial*, 28.

20. See Hedges, “Prison State of America.”

21. Timothy Williams, “The High Cost of Calling the Imprisoned,” *The New York Times*, March 30, 2015, accessed July 1, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/31/us/steep-costs-of-inmate-phone-calls-are-under-scrutiny.html>.

22. Daniel Wagner, “Prison Bankers Cash-in on Prison Customers: Inmates Families Gouged by Fees,” Center for Public Integrity, September 30, 2014, accessed June 20, 2015, <http://www.publicintegrity.org/2014/09/30/15761/prison-bankers-cash-captive-customers>.