

## Preface to the Second Edition

Police violence, mass incarceration and the death penalty—the structural triad of the U.S. penal state I term “Lockdown America”—are not just challenges *for* Christians today, they demand re-thinking and re-creating *what* Christianity is. The challenges demand not simply sensitizing and mobilizing Christians, but more importantly re-envisioning and redefining just what constitutes “Jesus followers” today.

By themselves, Christian communities will not achieve this reconstituting of Christian faith. Assemblies of Jesus-followers that effectively challenge the political repression and existential anguish of today will be those which work alongside interfaith and inter-religious communities and also with secular peoples of conscience. If Christians work in this way, they will confront the tortured restlessness that Lockdown America sears into the bodies, hearts, and minds of U.S. peoples today. A still white supremacist system in the United States disseminates a domestic terror that reinforces corporate power and threatens us all, but predominantly and most brutally those in black, brown and other communities of color.

There is a tortured restlessness and resistance among U.S. peoples because the structures of Lockdown America are themselves forms of torture and terror.

United States police have repeatedly been found to use torture in their apprehending and detaining practices, and specific techniques designed by U.S. city police forces have shaped the reigning forms of torture used by U.S. CIA and other government security forces.<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Senate's own investigations of 2014 have confirmed the CIA's continued involvement in torture.<sup>2</sup> The police are often the frontline for surveillance, control, and dissemination of terror in poor communities.

The very concept of long-term confinement, a constitutive element of mass incarceration in the US, is made worse by overcrowded and inhumane conditions, and has been analyzed and criticized as torture.<sup>3</sup> The eighty thousand or more prisoners who endure "solitary confinement" in U.S. prisons are adjudged victims of a slow assault on the dignity of the person, a disintegration of body and psyche—clearly, sufferers of torture.<sup>4</sup>

It is not just solitary confinement, however, that has exposed mass incarceration as generative of torture. Prison overcrowding and unwillingness of the U.S. prison system to commit resources for its burgeoning elderly, who are aging behind bars, also create conditions of torture. Law professor Jonathan Simon in fact uses the phrase "torture on the installment plan" precisely for this systemic exposure of increasingly ill and elderly to medical neglect and mistreatment.<sup>5</sup>

1. Darius Rejali, *Torture and Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 1-3, 239-42.
2. U.S. Senator Diane Feinstein, "Senate Intelligence Study Committee Study on CIA Detention and Interrogation Program," Released: December 8, 2014, <http://www.feinstein.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?p=senate-intelligence-committee-study-on-cia-detention-and-interrogation-program>, accessed June 20, 2015.
3. Stephen C. Richards, ed., *The Marion Experiment: Long-Term Solitary Confinement and the Supermax Movement* (Carbondale: Southern University Illinois Press, 2015), 3.
4. Mark Bowers, Patricia Fernandez, Megha Shah, and Kathleen Slager, *Solitary Confinement as Torture* (Chapel Hill, NC: North Carolina University School of Law, 2014), <http://www.law.unc.edu/documents/academics/humanrights/solitaryconfinement/fullreport.pdf>, accessed June 20, 2015.
5. Jonathan Simon, *Mass Incarceration on Trial: A Remarkable Court Decision and the Future of Prisons in America* Berkeley (University of California Press, 2014), 89.

Correctional officers, who lack resources for caring for the elderly, are also systematically hostile to providing medical treatment of prisoners, even though “the graying of the prison population has become a national epidemic afflicting states around the country—from California to Missouri to Florida.”<sup>6</sup>

US death rows, still displaying over 3,000 persons, are similarly sites of torture. After a person is sentenced to death, he or she is held in situations approximating solitary confinement, sometimes for decades, under prolonged and anguishing anticipation of the state’s calculation of an execution date. Judges’ rulings on particular cases of such death row confinement have declared it cruel and unusual, a form of torture, as have international jurists.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, U.S. global sovereignty abroad, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and Asia, is widely recognized as buttressed by practices of torture by U.S. officials and their proxies, if not by outright war (covert and overt) that terrorizes a people. The U.S. Senate confirmed and reported in 2014, in details that shock the conscience, that the U.S. has and does torture—and “torture” is the right word, not “enhanced interrogation techniques.”<sup>8</sup> U.S.

6. *At America's Expense: The Mass Incarceration of the Elderly* (New York: American Civil Liberties Union, 2012), [https://www.aclu.org/files/assets/elderlyprisonreport\\_20120613\\_1.pdf](https://www.aclu.org/files/assets/elderlyprisonreport_20120613_1.pdf), accessed June 20, 2015.

7. Juan E. Méndez, “The Death Penalty and the Absolute Prohibition of Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, and Degrading Treatment or Punishment,” *Human Rights Brief* 20, no. 1 (2012): 2–6.

8. Alfred W. McCoy, “How To Read the Senate Report on Torture,” *History News Network*, George Mason University, December 21, 2014, <http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/157950>, accessed June 20, 2015. The language of “enhanced interrogation techniques” is almost too perfect an example of Orwell’s critique of political euphemisms. “Political language,” wrote Orwell, “is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind” (George Orwell, *The Politics of the English Language and Other Essays* [London: Oxford City Press, 2009], 22). It needs to be emphasized here, however, that this is not only euphemism. There are many accounts of “torture” I reference here that could not easily be obscured by the euphemism of “enhanced interrogation techniques,” such that one might intellectually agonize about whether a certain practice is “torture” or not (e.g., “Is water-boarding torture? Would it be torture if a practice could save another life?”). In our time the problem is not just one of Orwellian interpretations with an abundance of obscuring euphemisms. The larger problem is a public refusal to face up to practices of

agents have themselves been torturers and have trained torturers of other nations' security forces. This has often meant the presence of U.S. military personnel during acts of torture and also supporting operations of forced removal that involve torture and massacre in displaced communities that are deemed "in the way" of development or engaged in dissent to such development and U.S. geopolitical interests.<sup>9</sup>

The cover art of this book signals one site of U.S. power's violent legacy. Yet the cover is also testimony to the power of people's vision and resistance to that legacy. The art is a key image from a mural in Pacux, Guatemala, a "model village" to which survivors of the massacre of some six hundred Maya Achi peoples were forcibly relocated. The 600 dead—107 children and 70 women—and their dislocation was the gruesome price they were forced to pay for construction of the Chixoy megadam in North-Central Guatemala of the late 1980s. Its construction by the U.S.-supported World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank required and then rationalized the destruction of the Maya community of Rio Negro. The mural wall, designed and painted by the grandchildren and children of the Chixoy Dam/Rio Negro massacre victims with the help of the extraordinary justice art collective H.I.J.O.S.<sup>10</sup> in

torture, which, if told or narrated, would remove all doubt that torture was being applied—and often by U.S. military and paramilitary forces. For records of these, see nn. 1 and 2 above, and also the testimonies of the tortured in Central America by U.S. or U.S.-backed officials documented in Jennifer K. Harbury, *Torture, Truth and the American Way: The History and Consequences of the US Involvement in Torture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 56–104. On the limits of George Orwell's politics of language, see Steven Poole, "My Problem with George Orwell," *The Guardian* January 17, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jan/17/my-problem-with-george-orwell>, accessed June 20, 2015.

9. Kate Doyle, "The Guatemalan Military: What the U.S. Files Reveal," *National Security Archive*. George Washington University, June 1, 2000, and Kirsten Weld, *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015), 91–118. Jean-Marie Simon, *Guatemala: Eternal Spring, Eternal Tyranny* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987), 79.
10. H.I.J.O.S. (Hijos e Hijas por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio, "Children for Identity and Justice against Oblivion and Silence"), <http://upsidedownworld.org/main/>

Guatemala City, is emblazoned with the words, “La voz de los nietos e hijos nunca se olvida el terror” (“Our children’s and grandchildren’s voices will never forget the terror”).<sup>11</sup>

Violated peoples do not forget. They dream alternatives and organize against overwhelming power. In the U.S., organized and creative resistance has an equally long history. In fact, this book is indebted to their long struggle. My thinking here would be impossible without their struggle and the many who have written to bear witness to their long-term efforts.

More recently, the efforts against police violence that rippled through U.S. communities in 2014 as in the *#blacklivesmatter* movements are one manifestation of popular resistance against a U.S. state terror’s long history. Churches have at times been part of that resistance. In spite of the appalling silence of the churches, and their at times outright complicity with Lockdown America today, some churches and their members organize and step forward.

Young people Kenisha and Randall, for example, led scores of their large congregation and visitors out into the intersections of Southside Chicago in 2014 to occupy the streets in a “Die-In” with their family. They walked-out their anguish in response to growing numbers of black youth shot by police, while police remained immune from accountability. The names of many of these youth were heavy on their hearts: Ferguson, Missouri’s Michael Brown, but also others across the country such as Yvette Smith, Tarika Wilson, Aiyana Stanley-Jones, Renisha McBride, Michael Cho, Anthony Baez, Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, Oscar Grant, and more. The Chicago

guatemala-archives-33/1980—from-memory-to-resistance-children-bear-witness-hijos-celebrates-10-years-in-guatemala-, accessed June 30, 2015.

11. See film by Lazar Konforti, “Chixoy Dam: No Justice, No Reparations, No Peace,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xF3YI7XMNEE> (accessed June 30, 2015). For more on this book’s cover image and this Guatemalan community, see below, chapter 2 (169-71) and the acknowledgments (484-85).

church's youth were followed into the streets that day *en masse* by their congregation's parents and older members who, in lament and rage, chanted, "We've got your back!" The youth progressed out onto the street carrying a make-shift wooden cross with a placard nailed to its center, its words proclaiming: "Black Lives Matter."

These youth, with the support of their community, provide one example in U.S. city streets of what this book terms "the way of the cross through Lockdown America." The book will explain the senses in which this can be viewed as the way of an "executed God" that includes belief, protesting, but also an intrepid local organizing of people's movements.

When I wrote the first edition of this book in 1999–2001, Lockdown America's triad of forces had long been servicing the U.S. corporate and militarized state. Lockdown America was already well consolidated and virulent. By 2001, United States police violence and brutality had been roundly denounced, decried, and documented by Amnesty International and others as out of compliance with international law. United States prison populations had then surpassed the 2 million mark, with retribution and neglect becoming the watchwords of jailors and wardens. "Rehabilitation?," asked one warden in the 1990s. "They come here to die," he said. Concerning the death penalty, the nation then was in the throes of two years that featured the highest number of annual executions since the temporary "abolition" of the U.S. death penalty between 1972 and 1976 (98 executions in 1999, 85 in 2000).

In spite of this strong presence of Lockdown America in 2001, the book's concerns often evoked evasive responses. "You have to understand," said one pastor after a lecture I gave in his church in 2001, "What you are talking about is so beneath the radar of most churches and citizens." People were disturbed. A few listened. Many were in denial.

As if interpreting this pastor's comment, political scientist Marie Gottschalk writes in her 2015 book on the carceral state, "Fifteen years ago, mass imprisonment was largely an invisible issue in the United States."<sup>12</sup> "Invisible to whom?" we might ask—certainly not to the imprisoned and their families and friends of those years. But yes, fifteen years ago it could seem invisible, given the neglect of the issues by major media and publishing houses. That is starting to change, but not quickly enough. One major reason for greater public attention to the issue has been the publication of law professor Michelle Alexander's book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness*.<sup>13</sup> It has been widely read, and is a veritable organizers' bible throughout the country, in secular and religious communities. One association of Christian faith leaders and congregations prepared a study guide on Alexander's book, integrating its themes with biblical readings and questions.<sup>14</sup> Jewish working groups, the American Friends Service Organization, and Unitarian Universalists have also developed study guides for organizing based on this book.

Many of the groups and writers who now decry mass incarceration and other structural abuses of Lockdown America stem from outside the church, and these are often leading the way. It is still time, though—in some ways long past time—for the churches to align with these groups and make their own distinctive contributions. What, though, might churches' contributions be? Again, more importantly, what must Christian belief and practice become in order to respond to the crisis of our time? This book is my response to such questions.<sup>15</sup>

12. Marie Gottschalk, *Caught: The Lockdown of American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 1.

13. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010).

14. Colleen Birchett, Tiauna Boyd, Iva E. Carruthers, and Alison Guise Johnson, *The New Jim Crow Study Guide*, updated ed. (Chicago: Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, Inc., 2014).

We face today an especially sinister emergence, not just more police violence, mass incarceration, and a death penalty, but the rise of the U.S. “carceral” or “penal state.” Here the powers of our state themselves become “penal,” not so much to punish violations or crimes, but more to enforce corporate-led economic exploitation of those deemed “surplus populations,” these being usually from black and brown communities. Draconian law enforcement at home usually means exploiting police powers’ access to the military industrial complex, yielding an ever more militarized police force of the state. These were strong themes of my 2001 book, and I have foregrounded them even more forcefully in this revised version. Many church groups have their “prison ministries” and Christians participate in numerous education and assistance programs to the incarcerated. But do they challenge the carceral state? This is the broader and deeper problematic the churches must confront. Numerous studies keep this larger problem in view. The carceral state, or “Prison Nation,” as others term it, is a legacy deeply entrenched in the nation’s history of white supremacist genocidal practices against indigenous peoples throughout the Americas. These practices were also at work in the transport and enslaving of Africans who through terror, dispossession, and lynching were kept in a state of terror, as often were U.S. Latinos, particularly Mexicans, and also Chinese Americans. The white supremacist genocidal legacy also includes the U.S. wars in lands of the Philippines, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, whose bombed peoples made their way to this country where they carry the scars of those wars still today. In addition to Alexander’s work, which views mass

15. Among other Christian thinkers who have sought to address the rising problem, see Amy Levad, *Redeeming a Prison Society: A Liturgical and Sacramental Response to Mass Incarceration* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014); James Samuel Logan, *Good Punishment? Christian Moral Practice and U.S. Imprisonment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); and T. Richard Snyder, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Punishment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).



incarceration as anchoring the more recent of several “racialized caste” systems in U.S. history,<sup>16</sup> there are other key texts that also place today’s Lockdown America in the history of U.S. state violence. These include Dylan Rodriguez’s *Forced Passages* (2006), Angela Y. Davis’ *Are Prisons Obsolete* (2003), Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s *Golden Gulag* (2006), Eddy Zheng’s *Other: An Asian and Pacific Islander Prisoners’ Anthology* (2007), and Loïc Wacquant’s *Punishing the Poor* (2004).

It is U.S. political prisoners in the bowels of the system who have made precisely these severe indictments of the U.S. prison nation. They have pointed out its racist, imperial, and exploiting capitalist dynamics. Therefore, I retain the emphases that my first edition gave to political prisoners. Alexander’s book is largely silent on the matter of U.S. political prisoners. The churches must do better, since U.S. mass incarceration and police violence are intricately linked to a political state violence meted out to those who oppose the state and now are political prisoners in the U.S. In this second edition, therefore, I make solidarity with political prisoners even more constitutive of Jesus-followers’ participation in what I term a liberating material spirituality. Although my book was dismissed by some precisely because it began its 2001 Preface with a quote from an “un-American” political prisoner, Mumia Abu-Jamal, I find it more necessary than ever to retain Abu-Jamal’s opening words. This book’s political theology, then, can be viewed as a call to Christians to strike a more radical solidarity with U.S. political prisoners.

On a personal level, I have been committed to visiting inside various prisons and jails since I spent a year-long internship investigating prisoner complaints in the Virginia State Penitentiary in the 1970s, when I also conducted extensive interviewing with

16. Alexander, *New Jim Crow*, 20-58.

officials about U.S. “criminal justice” in the Virginia Office of the Attorney General. But one does not resist the U.S. carceral state only by visiting inside prisons and with state officials. For me, then, years of resistance with organizations working against U.S. domination across Latin America and the Caribbean also have been crucial (groups in Guatemala and Mexico, especially). Similarly important for what readers find here have been the years I have sought to create support for political prisoner movements in the U.S. So, for me, major activism for Abu-Jamal has been enabling, whether as founding “Educators for Mumia Abu-Jamal” or working to support other movements in solidarity with him too, in my own classroom and school as well as at other social sites. This revised edition’s dedication to Abu-Jamal is one way to acknowledge his courage, perseverance, and invaluable revolutionary writings for humanity, creation, and justice for all.<sup>17</sup>

This second edition of *The Executed God*, appearing fifteen years after the first, still displays the basic structure of the 2001 edition, the core of which remains its two Parts. I have added a few new, introductory pages at the start of each Part in order to clarify the book’s overall logic.

Part One, slightly renamed “The Theatrics of State Terror,” has the most numerous revisions, since there the passage of fifteen years mandates an update on trends and statistics. Lockdown America has morphed in some distinctively new ways, as I have had to note in this new edition. I now give greater treatment to phenomena like the intensification of the U.S. surveillance state in the wake of 9/11, the growth of the private prison industry, the increasing confinement of immigrants in detention centers intersecting U.S. prisons, the increasing use of prisons and jails for the mentally ill (big

17. Mumia Abu-Jamal, *Writing on the Wall: Selected Prison Writings of Mumia Abu-Jamal*, edited by Johanna Fernández, foreword by Cornel West (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 2015).

jails like Rikers Island in NYC and Cook County Jail in Chicago are the largest holding centers for our mentally ill), the ever greater intensification of militarized policing (which I had emphasized in 2001), and the destruction of U.S. neighborhoods by criminal justice systems that parallels what U.S.-led economic policy does against poorer nations across the globe.

Part Two, which I have slightly renamed “A Counter-Theatrics to State Terror,” still presents the main substantial vision: a reconstruction of Christian practice for Jesus-followers amid Lockdown America today. That practice, what I term the “way of the cross,” has three always intersecting dimensions: adversarial politics, dramatic action, and the building of people’s movements. Of particular note, for this revised and expanded edition, I have added a new Chapter 6. Titled “Building Peoples’ Movements – 2: Abolishing Capital Punishment(s),” this chapter now serves as a summation of much of the book’s core concerns. In it I describe further the importance of the political prisoner Abu-Jamal, drawing from Walter Benjamin’s notion of “the great criminal,” a term used for those figures known not so much by their deeds as by the ways their cases expose state violence.

I must add a final point, one that signals for me the affective weight of this task. I have returned to re-think nearly every phrase and approach of this book, because I don’t know how one can be anything but sleepless—with lament, rage, and consternation—by the enormity of the devastation wrought by the building, maintenance, and toleration of Lockdown America today, with its triad of police violence, mass incarceration, and the death penalty. Columbia law professor Robert Ferguson, in his book *Inferno*, writes of the sense of shame and outrage that break upon observers if and when they face the systemic degradation deployed by U.S. prisons today. Agreeing with this, I also would confess to a certain vertigo when gazing

into the abyss of our prisons and Lockdown America. I find myself recalling the words of Nietzsche, who issued the following warning: “when you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss also gazes into you” (aphorism 146).<sup>18</sup> This book is one attempt to steady myself in critical reflection and for action, maybe to help steady others too, as that abyss gazes into all of us. The crisis upon us requires a coalition of our many movements, more than I can write about in any one book, to transpose our anguish and sleeplessness into energizing action for restoring human and planetary justice and peace. But in addressing Christians who may want to participate in such a coalition, we must let die some of our most cherished beliefs. We may feel that even our usual concepts of God get lost in this book, are “executed,” as it were. And yet, amid the state’s own executing of the living, its multiple death-dealing powers that create more death and consign many to the status of the “living dead,” this book discerns an “executed god” of another sort, as a greater, deeper, and wider power—a power *in and of the people*. This second edition of *The Executed God* seeks to make that power ever clearer, more effective, a greater catalyst of a liberating material spirituality, one that calls out from the earth and its peoples to us all.

18. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 1973), 68.