

**A Prison by Any Other Name: A Review of Disability Incarcerated**

**Liat Ben-Moshe, Chris Chapman, & Allison C. Carey (Eds.) (2014). *Disability Incarcerated: Imprisonment and Disability in the United States and Canada*. Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN 978-1-137-39323-4.**

Reviewed by Bonnie Burstow  
Faculty, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto  
bonnie.burstow@utoronto.ca

“Is it surprising,” asks philosopher Michel Foucault (1977/1995), “that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?” In this daring question initially posed 40 years ago, but indeed, more relevant today than ever, lies the foundation on which this new disability anthology is based. Not an uncommon starting point for a text on incarceration but a bold new grounding for one on disability.

This anthology brings together scholars from across the United States and Canada to examine the “managing” of disability as a multi-faceted and intrinsically carceral project. Focused primarily, albeit not exclusively, on “psychiatric disability” and “intellectual disability,” methodically and brilliantly, the contributors lay bear the carceral project at the base of what presents itself as “services” or other measures seen as “necessary.” Moreover, they demonstrate the ways in which incarceration manufactures “disability.” In the process they bring a number of scholarly and indeed activist areas into conversation with one another. In particular they bring critical disability studies into conversation with radical criminology, and along with it, mad studies and anti-racist studies.

The purpose of the anthology is fourfold—and it is announced clearly and transparently at the start:

The first is to situate disability within the scholarship on prisons, criminal justice, and incarceration—and thereby to show that experiences of disabled people, and processes of disablement, are central to understanding the rationales, practices, and consequences of incarceration. The second is to expand the notions of “incarceration” to encompass a wide variety of social setting and practices... The third is to explore and theorize various interlockings of incarceration and disability (x).

The fourth is to “invite dialogue and collaboration among often unconnected scholars and activists to promote social change” (xi). All goals are met, and met with acumen—one might say brilliance.

Beginning with a riveting foreword by no less a figure than Black activist and prison abolitionist Angela Y. Davis and ending with harrowing epilogue by Robert McRuer, from start to finish this book pulls off what all scholarly books would like to do but few manage—being a page turner. Introducing facts little known in the process of unfolding its arguments, and with writing which is at once assessable and passionate, facet by facet, it explores the carceral nature of our dominant approaches to “disability” and concomitantly, the disabling processes which attend incarceration. Well known carceral forms touched on include: prisons, large psychiatric institutions, “back wards,” refugee camps, and detention centres. What is particularly gratifying, the authors take as a starting point Foucault’s warning that change is not as we imagine it, that when obviously penal solutions are abandoned, they tend to be replaced by new institutions that are part of the same archive (in other words, are themselves predicated on scrutiny, discipline, and control). Accordingly, the authors likewise probe such institutions as group homes, smaller institutions for the “intellectually impaired,” and indeed the use of treatments like drugs and ECT as forms of containment themselves. Moreover, they demonstrate that phenomena such as the

shutting down of psychiatric institutions in the 70s are matched by the growth and use of other types of incarceration (with prisons now the major place where the psychiatricized are held). What the contributors argue and argue convincingly is that our predominant institutions for the disabled are all carceral, all bent on “normalizing,” whether they be large prisons or chemical restraints, whether they be old dilapidated hospital buildings which neighbours point to in dread or the new attractive structures at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health which blend imperceptibly into the environment, whether they constitute what we routinely identify as “an institution” or what we now call “the community,” whether they transparently “stigmatize” or are part of an anti-stigma campaign that purports to do the precise opposite.

The book provides many history lessons, examining how the diverse populations that make up the incarcerated first got grouped together in prison or prison-like settings—the poor, the racialized, the disabled. Correspondingly, in the attempt to explain how and why the “same populations” are always incarcerated, it demonstrates the interlocking and intersecting nature of the various oppressions; and in the process, it introduces the reader to such alarming statistics as African American men are diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia “5 to 7 times more often than white men” (146).

While every single chapter is a gift in its own right, a number of chapters particularly stand out. These include: the stunning introduction by Davis, in which she reflects for the first time on being urged to take psychiatric drugs in prison; the remarkable introduction by the three editors, which lays the basis for understanding, at once mapping the carceral project onto disability and highlighting the intersecting and interlocking oppressions involved; the history chapters by Chapman (Chapters 2 and 3); Erevelles’s articulation of the horrific school-to prison pipeline that is the lot of so many Black men (Chapter 5); Abbas and Voronka’s problematizing of institu-

tional erasure as epitomized in the seemingly benign “blend-in structures” at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (Chapter 7); Patel on the “racing” of madness (Chapter 11); Friedman and Beckwith’s investigation of the highly successful self-advocacy by People First and Speaking for Ourselves (Chapter 13); Ben-Moshe’s probing of “alternatives” (Chapter 14); and the closing remarks by McRuer, which aptly tie racism and the new forms of imprisonment to the neoliberal agenda (epilogue).

What is thrilling about the book more generally, from start to finish, it ties together scholarly and activist concerns. That is, it at once provides a detailed and indeed radical analysis of what is wrong, and it gives us some idea of what can be done about it.

And what are its limitations? Deficits? Errors? Shortcomings? To start with relatively minor ones, it sometimes falls into simplistic references to historical events. For example, it repeats the common claim that “homosexuality” was “removed” from the DSM in the 70s, albeit, as shown in Burstow (1990), it was not exactly removed but hidden under new categories. By the same token, in Ben-Moshe’s otherwise exceptional chapter, she repeats without questioning it what many of us active at the time tend to see as the “Ruth Morris version” of the Ruth Morris story (for a very different account of what unfolded at “My Brother’s Place” for example, see Grower, 1988). Additionally, there is a conflation between the mad movement and the antipsychiatry movement. And then there are more meaty problems. The sparseness of feminist analysis is surely one.

What is significant in this regard, while men are disproportionately imprisoned in institutions which society commonly recognizes as prisons, the very opposite is so when it comes to those institutions specifically built for the “psychiatrically disabled” or “intellectually disabled.” This being the case, one has to wonder, why were the vast majority of the examples explored ex-

amples of men? And what about women's history? For example, why were no references made even in passing to such practices as incarcerating women in objects as small as the bed, otherwise known as the "rest cure"? My suspicion, I would add, is that the problem which I am identifying here to a degree arises from the Foucault framing itself. Foucault himself leaves out women and tends to frame questions and provide answers in ways that privilege men. By the same token, just like Foucault privileges the early history of France in understanding psychiatric incarceration, so do the editors.

More conspicuously missing is an inclusion of ageism. While there is passing reference to nursing homes as places of incarceration for the "disabled," no space is devoted to the phenomenon. Additionally, in line with most political books—and so it is hard to fault the editors here—facts and phenomena which clash with an additive approach to oppression (e.g., the fact that the vast majority of people subjected to ECT are middle and upper middle class white women), find little place in the anthology.

That said, most books in this area prioritize class and race while leaving out disability. The strength of this book is precisely the centralizing and interweaving of disability—a momentous achievement. Correspondingly, three oppressions figure throughout in highly meaningful and enlightening ways (ableism, classism, and racism). And others are woven in and out.

All things considered, this a remarkable book. *Disability Incarcerated* constitutes a major contribution to critical disability and penal studies, joining the two as no other book does. In this regard, it draws on critical disability foundations as articulated by writers such as Titchkosky (Titchkosky and Michalko, 2009) and prison abolition principles as articulated by authors like Mathiesen (1974), while extending them and in the process transforming them. It likewise constitutes a unique contribution to anti-racist studies, bringing into the conversation such analyses

such as Thobani (2007). Moreover, on a more personal level, it consistently challenges the reader to imagine what is now almost unimaginable, to probe beneath the surface, to understand on whole new levels. Consider in this regard this thrilling passage by Chapman: “Every time a group home is built, every time one can’t imagine a world without prisons or psych wards, every time funding is available for a nursing home but not for care in one’s own home, the fundamentals of the political rationalization of the ‘great confinement of the poor’ lives on” (39).

I encourage everyone to read this anthology, though especially disability theorists, criminologists, social workers, nurses, survivors, activists. To address some of these potential audiences individually, professionals (whether survivors, people with disabilities, or otherwise), some chapter or other is bound to deepen your analysis; it may lead you to rethink plans you considered “progressive,” to reconsider how you go about your work, to heed the resurgent voices of the incarcerated and “disabled” oppressed to a degree that you had not previously, or to investigate ways of genuinely yielding power to the so-called “service users”—something necessary and inevitable. Survivors, whatever your positionality, I suspect that you will find it validating. And activists, it opens up the potential for new forms of coalitions.

In summation, this book is a rare treat. Only now and then does a work of scholarship so ground-breaking, so well theorized, and so daring appear on the scene. And seldom do we come across an anthology destined to become a classic. Happily, *Disability Incarcerated* is such a book.

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