Newsletter of the
Association of Carceral Sites & Museums

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The Forum

Dedicated to the advancement of carceral interpretation for public benefit.

Learn more at www.carceral.org!

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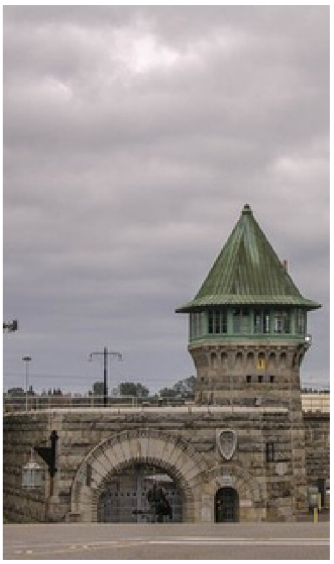
Monthly Meet-Up

The ACSM hosts monthly meetings for practitioners, scholars, and others involved with or interested in historic prison museums, and/or carceral sites. Meetings take place via Zoom on the second Monday of each month at 3:00 PM EST and cover a wide range of topics, including interpretation, community engagement strategies, and collaborative practices. Contact us at **thecarceral@gmail.com** to sign-up in order to attend. We hope to see you there!

Featured Site



Originally known as the Folsom Prison Museum, this site was dedicated on July 1, 1987, and annexed in 2011 by the Old Guard Foundation (OGF). In 2014, the OFG "morphed the museum into the Big House Prison Museum with the intention of making it a national museum, exposition and education center for Corrections and the people who live, work and visit the facilities." Although the museum is currently closed, you can learn more about the facility on their their website.

From The Field

In September 2020, The Old Idaho State Penitentiary opened, "Disturbing Justice: The Stories of Riots and Disturbances at the Old Idaho Penitentiary, 1910 - 1973." The project included artwork by Allen Gladfelter, an independent comic artist and illustrator

"Disturbing Justice" provides an institutional history of the Idaho State Penitentiary, while also connecting Idaho prisons to those across the United States, past and present. It is a remarkable example of creative, engaging public history!

Learn more about the exhibit in Hayley Noble's 2020 NCPH review.

New Read!

Rikers: An Oral History
Book by Graham Rayman and Reuven Blau
(Random House, 2023)

"When I was in prison in New York in 2011, we had a name for Rikers Island: The Wild West. I'd come from an upstate county several hours north of that, so I'd never been inside the notorious New York City jail complex just across the East River from LaGuardia Airport. But I listened aghast at the tales of a teeming and lawless lockup beset by drugs, sex and violence. From where I sat in an only-mildly chaotic state prison, the place sounded terrifying. As it turns out, it was probably even worse than I thought—and Reuven Blau and Graham Rayman's new book of the scandal-plagued correctional complex lays it out in graphic, stomach-churning detail.

Rikers: An Oral History opens with some little-known details about the complex's history: It was founded on top of a literal garbage dump. That was in the 1800s, and since then things have only gotten worse. Violence is rising, guards aren't showing up for work and more detainees died behind bars last year than in any other year since at least 2013." Read more of Keri Blakinger's review here!

Historic Prisons In The Media

"What was once the St. Louis County Jail in Duluth is now a mixed-income apartment building – with some of the building's distinctive original features retained. Located at 521 W. 2nd St., the building has kept much of its historic touch, with jail cells, bars on windows, and steel walls retained in the historic space. According to Leijona's website, the building was constructed in 1924 and has since been registered on the National Register of Historic places.

Named Leijona — Finnish for "lion" — some of the residential living is reserved for income-qualified tenants earning less than 60-70% of the area median income. The building once held 93 jail cells and was in operation from 1924-1985, according to historical records. A new jail was built and opened off of Haines Road in 1994."

Pop Culture

Ear Hustle launched in 2017 as the first podcast created and produced in prison (San Quentin State Prison in California). In November 2022, they debuted "Episode 81: Fences," which considers how "different kinds of prison architecture leave different marks on the people who live there. [It explores] how architecture shapes the experience of incarceration, and how people push back to reclaim space for themselves."

Illustration by Mark Stanley-Bey, an incarcerated artist.

Now On Display

"Inside the American Heritage Museum, a new exhibit [see photo above] takes guests into an immersive experience to explore one of the most intense and dark moments of American military history.

The Hỏa Lò Prison — sarcastically referred to as the "Hanoi Hilton" — was a notorious North Vietnamese prison for American captives during the Vietnam War, including the late U.S. Sen. John McCain. The prison has been painstakingly reconstructed, using original materials, at the American Heritage Museum as part of a display on the war.

The museum was able to obtain prison materials after a donation from Canadian collector Jeet Mahal. During the early 1990s, Mahal noticed that the Vietnamese were beginning to destroy several prisons used during the war, and was able to purchase Hỏa Lò Prison materials, including original brickwork, stone cells, cell doors, stone beds and other items."

Learn more about the story, brought to you by Jesse Collings at MetroWest Daily News.

From The Desk of The Co-President

DR. C. MORGAN GREFE,
ACSM CO-FOUNDER & CO-PRESIDENT

I entered graduate school in 1998 and left in 2005. Although I read countless works while there, my stint was bookended (pun intended), by two books that are historical in nature, but more journalist and biographical than monographs. Each shaped not only my professional life, but also my notion for what it meant to be aware and engaged in 21st century America, and both can relate to our work of understanding and interpreting carceral sites and connecting that to participation in an active democracy.

First, in 1998, Allen M. Hornblum's Acres of Skin: Human Experiments at Holmesburg Prison hit the shelves. In the early 2000s, I had the opportunity to meet in a small group with Hornblum and some of the formerly-incarcerated men about whom he wrote. That conversation has stayed with me for more than twenty years—the voices of these men after so many years of silence, sharing with us the answers they now had after decades of only pain and questions.

Years later, in 2005, I attended a talk by Michael D'Antonio about his book, The State Boys Rebellion. If I had been shaken by Acres of Skin, this book brought me to my knees. From the 1940s into the 1970s, the State of Massachusetts was testing poor boys and classifying them as "feeble minded," then putting them to work for free and to be experimented upon in the name of medical science.

All of these things were happening in the second half of the 20th century, and some had been happening just minutes from where I grew up and from where I went to school. In fact, one of the perpetrators was my grandparents' colleagues in the Philadelphia medical community. This history didn't feel so past. It felt, and looked, a lot like now.

And then, just a couple of weeks ago, an alert from the Boston Globe popped up on my phone. An upcoming bill in the Massachusetts State Legislature suggested allowing incarcerated individuals to donate their organs in return for reduced sentences. I could only assume that this headline was click bait, or that I must be misunderstanding the proposal. I wasn't. The two officials currently putting forward the bill claim this is a victory for the bodily autonomy of incarcerated persons. They say it will help with the number of People of Color who are waiting for organ transplants. They say that it's a "pro-prisoner" bill.

They are woefully misinformed.

This is why we need carceral history. We need sites, new scholarships, news stories, podcasts and more that center the human stories of incarceration in ways that don't diminish victims of crime, but that also do not discredit the humanity of those on the inside. We need to hear voices and see faces, because it is apparently still too easy to dehumanize the men, women, and children incarcerated today.

While particular sites might not connect directly with these stories, the visitors who come to these museums and programs can and should learn about how the past connects to the present, because while the past needs our preservation, the present needs our care.