

The Forum

Dedicated to the advancement of carceral interpretation for public benefit.

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Featured Site

Historic Brushy Mountain State Penitentiary was Tennessee's first maximum-security prison. Known as "the Gates of Hell," the facility opened in 1896 and held the state's most violent offenders until its closure in 2009. The building was constructed using inmate labor, and prisoners worked for decades in the nearby coal mines. Brushy Mountain also housed James Earl Ray, who assassinated Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968.

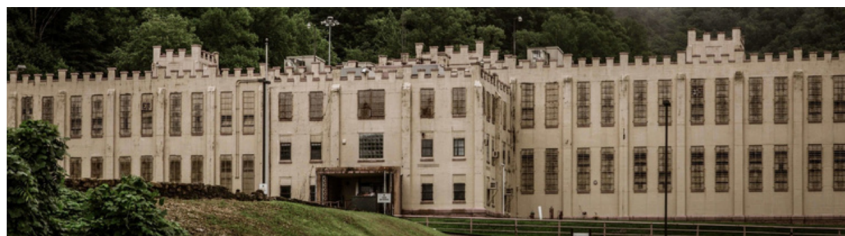


Photo courtesy of HBMSF

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!

From the Archive

"On August 28, 1967 a fifteen-year old black girl from Mt. Kisco, New York was admitted to the Hudson Training School for Girls. During her four months there she received letters from family, friends, and lovers.

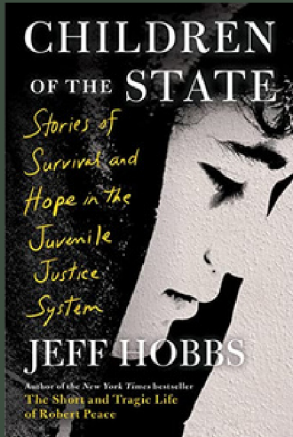


The letters were from a boyfriend in county jail for robbery, another in Vietnam, from her devoted sister "Little Boots," and one from her distraught mother, often apologizing for not making the long and probably expensive trek upstate to visit. Letters from schoolmates told of the newest songs, latest dances, gossiped about who was going out with whom. The letter writers all urged Faye to take care of herself, to have courage facing the challenging situation, and to remember, most of all, that she was loved."

Read more about Faye's story in "[The Attic Letters: A Footnote to Mystery.](#)" by Rex Weiner (August 2019).

New Read!

Children of the State: Stories of Survival and Hope
in the Juvenile Justice System
By Jeff Hobbs
(Simon & Schuster, 2023)



In his new book, *Children of the State*, Jeff Hobbs sheds light on children caught up in the juvenile justice system. He offers readers some historical content, relevant statistics, and discussions of public policy. However, Hobbs' main focus is the human experience – particularly that of the youth caught up in the school-to-prison pipeline. He offers thoughtful portraits of teenagers confined in juvenile hall, and considers the educators and counselors whose mission it is to restore these youth back to the "real world."



Photo by Tai Kwun

The Politics of Prison Art

"The travelling exhibition of 100 mostly drawings and paintings by eight suspected terrorists held for years by the US military at its base in Cuba, *Art from Guantánamo Bay*, raises a number of questions: is this an art show or a political message? Should we view people who may be criminals as artists? And perhaps the most pressing question the detainees, their attorneys, and the Pentagon are grappling with is: who owns this art?"

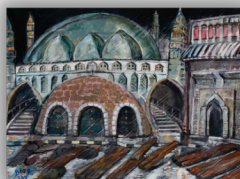
In 2017, however, after the first *Art from Guantánamo Bay* exhibition... the US Department of Defense reversed its position and blocked the release of all works created by prisoners, regardless of whether or not military prosecutors believed their creators were associated with terrorism or anti-American acts.

[In late 2022]... current and former Guantánamo detainees published a letter urging President Joseph Biden to reverse the Trump-era restriction on art leaving the complex.

The pandemic paused the travels of the *Art from Guantánamo Bay* for a time, but [last year it] made stops at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia and at Catamount Arts in St Johnsbury, Vermont.

"I'm looking for the next venue right now," [Erin Thompson, the professor of art crime at John Jay College and the curator of *Art from Guantánamo Bay*] says."

Excerpt from Daniel Grant's story, "US government withholds art made by detainees at Guantánamo Bay," in *The Art Newspaper* (October 2022). Read the whole story [here!](#)



Above images
courtesy of
ART FROM
GUANTÁNAMO BAY
exhibition.

Now on Display

"As Hong Kong's Tai Kwun heritage and arts centre becomes increasingly known for hosting contemporary art and live shows – and for its many eating establishments – it can be easy for visitors to gloss over the compound's complex and storied history as the home of Victoria Gaol, Hong Kong's first prison.

But a new digital programme called "DigiRadiance" hopes to re-emphasise Tai Kwun's heritage by providing an artistic glimpse into memories from the mid-19th-century prison.

Curated by Tai Kwun curators Ying Kwok and Jims Lam, the two-part programme consists of a 30-minute immersive show in the F Hall space, and five augmented reality (AR) checkpoints dotted around the Prison Yard and D Hall that allow visitors to engage with Tai Kwun's architectural features and various details related to prison life."

Excerpt from Mabel Lui's story, "What was Hong Kong's first prison like?," in the *South China Morning Post* (February 2023). Read the whole story [here!](#)



From The Desk of The Co-President

DR. MEGAN CULLEN TEWELL,
ACSM CO-FOUNDER & CO-PRESIDENT

Greetings, ACSM Members:

As we approach the first official day of Spring (March 20, 2023) I, like many others, find myself appreciating the buttery-yellow daffodils, the intrepid green tree buds, and the increasing industriousness of colorful birds, bees, and butterflies.

But, I also cannot help but think of the lines penned by William Wordsworth in his contemplative poem, "Lines Written in Early Spring."

I heard a thousand blended notes,
While in a grove I sate reclined,
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind.

To her fair works did nature link
The human soul that through me ran;
And much it grieved my heart to think
What man has made of man.



The last two lines, in particular, resonate with me now, especially as the beauty of the new season envelops us, and we shrug off the chill of winter. "And much it grieved my heart to think/What man has made of man."

At this time, excessive numbers of men, women, and children remain locked behind bars in the United States, swept up in an ongoing carceral crisis. Inside concrete cages, these people – our fellow citizens and fellow humans – are prohibited from fully experiencing the natural passage of time, epitomized by the changing of the seasons. But, I see in Spring the opportunity to hope for better; the inspiration for growth, change, and restoration. And I wonder how we can apply the natural lessons of Spring to the predicament at hand.

Approximately 600,000 Americans are released from state and federal prisons in the United States each year, and millions more are liberated from local jails and detention centers. However, even as these returning citizens attempt to leave the "dark," "long," and "lonesome" days of their imprisonment behind them (analogous to a spiritual winter), they often fail to find a verdant Spring before them.* Instead of reintegration and opportunity, formerly incarcerated people confront hardship in terms of meeting their basic needs, reclaiming their civic rights (such as voting or public service), securing employment, finding housing, and rejoining communities. Despite satisfying their debt to society, their winter never seems to end. How can that change? What does the promise of renewal offer?

As we work to understand and engage with historic and contemporary carceral realities, these questions about our individual and shared humanity continue to guide us. And we must attempt to convert the abstract symbols of hope inherent in our world, such as the advent of Spring, into real policies, programs, and practices. The seasons are capable of change. And people can and do change, as well. Our work with carceral sites has an incredible opportunity to embrace, celebrate, and share this truth.

*Quoted from the memoir of Austin Reed, written during his confinement from the 1830s to the 1850s, and published as "The Life and Adventures of a Haunted Convict, or the Inmate of a Gloomy Prison,"