

# The Forum

Dedicated to the advancement of carceral interpretation for public benefit.

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## Featured Site

Abraham "Abe" Curry, noted entrepreneur and co-founder of Carson City, Nevada, leased part of the Warm Springs Hotel (built around 1860) to the Nevada Territory to hold prisoners. Two years later, the State of Nevada purchased the property for use as a prison. The title to the property was disputed for years afterwards and finally settled by the Legislature in 1879. The State of Nevada rebuilt the prison campus after a fire in 1867, which continued to operate until 2012. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2015, and the site offers intermittent tours today.



Historic photograph of the Nevada State Prison, courtesy of the Nevada State Prison Preservation Society.

Information courtesy of Nevada SHPO.

## 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](mailto:thecarceral@gmail.com) to sign-up in order to attend. We hope to see you there!

## Excerpt

### The Diary of a Rikers Island Library Worker



For more than a year, I've been working in New York City jails as a library assistant for the Brooklyn Public Library.

The Department of Correction (D.O.C.) doesn't give us any bookshelves, so at Rikers my colleagues and I rolled a squeaky cart from dorm to dorm.

I'm always moved by the sense of gratitude and warmth that some people express when we're able to get them the books that they asked for.

When I'd finish a shift at Rikers, my legs would be sore from standing all day. I'd think about all the people I'd talked to. I'd hope that I had made some small difference for them.

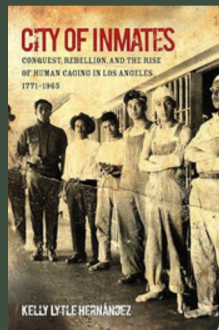
The words of a patron stuck with me: "At least you get to go home."

Read the entire story by Medar de la Cruz in [The New Yorker](#) (May 12, 2023).

# Book Club!

**City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771–1965**  
By Kelly Lytle Hernández  
(University of North Carolina Press, 2017)

This book explains how the City of Angels became the capital city of the world's leading incarcerator. Marshaling more than two centuries of evidence, historian Kelly Lytle Hernandez unmask how histories of native elimination, immigrant exclusion, and black disappearance drove the rise of incarceration in Los Angeles. In this telling, which spans from the Spanish colonial era to the outbreak of the 1965 Watts Rebellion, Hernandez documents the persistent historical bond between the racial fantasies of conquest, namely its settler colonial form, and the eliminatory capacities of incarceration. But *City of Inmates* is also a chronicle of resilience and rebellion, documenting how targeted peoples and communities have always fought back.



## On Display

From prison to art gallery, former inmates take center stage

"When Sherrill Roland talks about his art, he's sure to mention steel, resin and Kool-Aid. These materials, easily accessible during his time in prison, still figure prominently in the art he creates now that he's free. He used lemonade-flavored Kool-Aid in his featured piece "168.803," and cherry, blue raspberry and grape flavors in other sculptures in this series.

Kool-Aid-filled lines represent the offset pattern of a cinder block wall Roland stared at during his time in jail in 2013 while dreaming about his home in North Carolina.

Roland, who was wrongfully incarcerated on a misdemeanor charge for more than 10 months during his first year of graduate school, [was] one of the artists featured in the Ford Foundation Gallery's show, "No Justice Without Love."



The works, [displayed] through June 30, 2023 addressed themes of mass incarceration and criminal justice, and many of the featured artists were formerly incarcerated.

## Historical Moments

In 2014 The State of Delaware Public Archives unveiled a historical marker commemorating the first female prison guards in the United States at New Castle County's Greenbank Park, near the site where they served and made women's history, Delaware history, and American history.

The guards were nicknamed "Annie Oakleys" for their excellent shooting ability with machine guns and rifles. They began working for the prison in the lower Red Clay Valley in 1943 due to the shortage of male guards that resulted from World War II.

The historical marker, "The Annie Oakleys: First Female Prison Guards in the United States", notes that the New Castle County Workhouse at Greenbank was the first penal institution in the U.S.A. to employ armed female guards.

The New Castle County Workhouse jailed prisoners for seventy years from 1901 to 1971. All that remains of the prison is a single guard tower located near the Capitol Little League baseball fields at Newport Gap Pike and Kirkwood Highway.

This story originally appeared in the AP in April 2019.

## A Closer Look at a Calaboose



Cascade's historic old jail is one of only two remaining buildings in Iowa designated as a "calaboose," or a local jail separated from a town's main street, typically found in towns with under 2,000 people. Constructed in 1881, the jail was part of Cascade's incorporation into an official town.

A calaboose is, quite simply, a tiny jail. Designed to house prisoners only for a short time, a calaboose could be anything from an iron cage to a poured concrete blockhouse. Easily constructed and more affordable for small communities than a full-sized building, calaboses once dotted the rural landscape. Now, it is considered a relic of a bygone era in law enforcement and no longer in use.

Courtesy of Daniel Charland (March 15, 2023)

Courtesy of William E. Moore's book, "The Texas Calaboose, and Other Forgotten Jails" (2018).

# History Lesson

## FIVE WAYS PRISONERS WERE USED FOR PROFIT THROUGHOUT U.S. HISTORY

### 1. Bringing convict labor from Great Britain

Before the American Revolution, Britain used America as a dumping ground for its convicts; approximately one quarter of all British immigrants to America in the 18th century were convicts. In 1718 Britain passed the Transportation Act, providing that people convicted of burglary, robbery, perjury, forgery, and theft could, at the court's discretion, be sent to America for at least seven years rather than be hanged.

### 2. Privatizing the penitentiary

After the United States experienced its first great depression in 1844, Louisiana needed money, so it privatized its penitentiary, leading it to a company called McHatton, Pratt, & Ward. The company was responsible for the operations of the prison, including feeding and clothing inmates, and it could use inmate labor toward its own ends. The company put inmates to work from dawn till dusk in the penitentiary's textile factory. Men who couldn't keep up with the work were beaten and whipped, sometimes to death.

### 3. Selling children into slavery

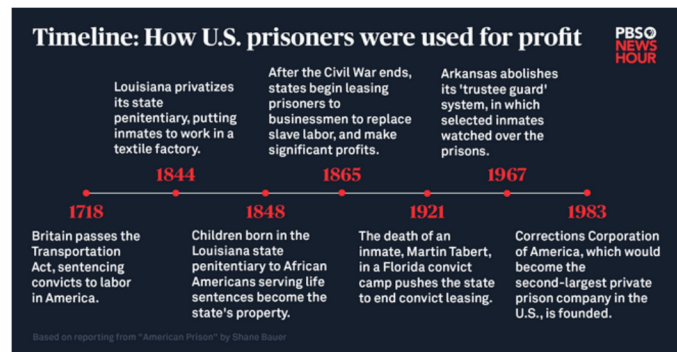
Before the Civil War, Louisiana imprisoned enslaved people, including women, for "serious" crimes, generally involving acts of rebellion against the slave system. Some of these female prisoners became pregnant, either by fellow inmates or prison officials. In 1848, state legislatures passed a law declaring that all children born in the penitentiary to African Americans serving life sentences would become property of the state. The women would raise the children inside the prison until the age of 10, at which point they would be auctioned on the courthouse steps.

### 4. Replacing enslaved people with convicts

After the Civil War, the former owners of enslaved people looked for ways to continue using forced labor. With Southern economies devastated by the war, businessmen convinced states to lease them their prisoners. Convicts dug levies, laid railroad tracks, picked cotton, and mined coal for private companies and planters. The system, known as convict leasing, was profitable not only for the lessees, but for the states themselves, which typically demanded a cut of the profits. Tennessee once made 10 percent of its state budget from convict leasing. There was simply no incentive for lessees to avoid working people to death. In 1870 Alabama prison officials reported that more than 40 percent of their convicts had died in their mining camps.

### 5. Squeezing every dollar out of prisoners

Around the end of the 19th century, states became jealous of the profits that lessees were making from their convicts, and created an experimental "prison plantation" system in response. It was a success. In just over a decade, the state was making around \$1.25 million in today's dollars from its plantations, exceeding its income from the convict lease system. By 1928 the state of Texas would be running 12 prison plantations. States throughout the South stopped hiring out their convicts to private businessmen and ran their own plantations, keeping all the profits. Arkansas allowed the practice until 1967.



Content provided by Shane Bauer.  
Courtesy of PBS News Hour (February 2020).  
Learn more in Bauer's book, "American Prison" (2018).