

A View of 18th and 19th Centuries Incarceration Typologies

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Jails, Prisons, Dungeons, Labor Camps: Incarceration has existed as long as humans have had civilization. This statement is false. Incarceration of today is firmly rooted in the 18th and 19th century.¹ This incarceration of Europe and North America has infected the world through colonization. It is this incarceration that I am interested in. The incarceration that developed in the 18th and 19th century is the backbone of contemporary incarceration complexes within the United States of America along with other parts of the world. Through this period the architecture of incarceration developed and morphed into one that serves a central role of contemporary incarceration to exploit the labor the incarcerated,

Our nation incarcerates more than 1.2 million people in state and federal prisons, and two out of three of these incarcerated people are also workers. In most instances, the jobs these nearly 800,000 incarcerated workers have look similar to those of millions of people working on the outside. But there are two crucial differences: Incarcerated workers are under the complete control of their employers, and they have been stripped of even the most minimal protections against labor exploitation and abuse ²

The 13th Amendment abolished slavery in all cases other than “a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted.” ³ A throughline between the end of slavery across the western world and a need for accessible cheap or free labor affected shifts in the purpose of the architectures of incarceration. Through the 18th and 19th century many types of architecture were developed for the incarceration of people. Some of these types were informed Bentham’s interest in efficiency and control, Quaker prison reforms, views on the poor and destitute: independent of any of those, incarceration that exploits the labor of incarcerated people became the guiding principle of incarceration through this period and into the modern day. The contemporary incar-

1 Miller, Greg. 2022. The Invention of Incarceration. Knowable Magazine.

2 ACLU. 2022. Captive Labor: Exploitation of Incarcerated Workers. June 15. Accessed November 24, 2023. <https://www.aclu.org/news/human-rights/captive-labor-exploitation-of-incarcerated-workers>.

3 Congress of the United States of America. 1865. The House Joint Resolution Proposing the 13th Amendment to the Constitution. 136. January 31.

ceration complexes are a multi-faceted development taking from many of these types to construct a prison that exists for many purposes but a central purpose of that is labor exploitation.

Public perceptions of incarceration have been that of control. Even as the concept of imprisonment for an extended period first came to popularity in the 18th century ideas on how best to control large groups of people as efficiently as possible and with as few people as possible was a central concept of prison designs. Control is a large vague term that encompasses ways in which prisoner are physically controlled or surveilled or in a more theoretical sense of endowing a feeling of control. One prison concept that is more cultural and intellectually impactful than it ever physically was Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon,

An intrinsic part of them was the 'Panopticon' prison scheme, which was designed to allow a single watchman to observe (-opticon) all (pan) inmates of an institution – without the latter being able to tell whether they were being watched or not ⁴

At the time of Bentham writing and theories on prison design (late 18th century), England was pursuing a practice of penal colonies, Australia being a central place for this. Bentham was opposed to the penal colonies, not for moral reasons but instead for financial reasons. He viewed the practice of shipping convicts across the world as too costly. The *Panopticon* was not just about observing prisoners, but it was about physically and psychologically controlling prisoners. But the *Panopticon* design was never widely adopted, only a couple of them were built around the world.

Whereas much of the work pursued by Bentham in the field of prison design is theoretical or academic, John Haviland was designing prisons all over the world. Norman Johnstone states the for a period from the end of the 18th century and into the 19th century John Haviland was the Jailor to the World. His prison designs took inspiration Bentham's *Panopticon*. Haviland prison design were radial, similarly to the *Panopticon*, but the shape of was a wheel and spoke. An enclosed prison space with a singular entrance towards the central space with

4 Furlong, Gillian. 2015. Designs for a Panopticon Prison by Jermeij Betham: Section of Inspection House; Pland of Houses of Inspections; Section Plan, C. 1791. London: UCL Press.

cell block as spokes around the central complex.⁵ Both the prison types developed by Bentham and Haviland were based on two standards of control. One being constructing a feeling of control around solitary cells with tightly regulated points of entry and exit, as well as control through observation.

Through this period of the 17th and 18th century as the notion of long-term imprisonment became more normalized there were developments to rebrand imprisonment through a lens of reform. Both efforts to make incarceration more humane and to justify the act of incarceration through the lens of “reforming” the individual. Haviland, wheel and spoke prison design, also involved a prison reform that had been championed by Quakers of keeping prisoners in solitary confinement. The Eastern State Penitentiary, constructed in 1826 utilized the idea of solitary confinement. “This consisted of solitary confinement in a single cell night and day for the length of the sentence and became known as the Pennsylvania System”⁶ It was viewed that this act would give incarcerated people time of self-reflection, this reflection had very direct religious connotations, to “repent to god.”⁷

The Quaker prison reforms were not the only action in this period to introduce methods of reforming incarcerated persons. Many of these actions were still firmly rooted in religion. Emblematic of this was presented by Michel Foucault in his seminal text *Discipline & Punish*, Prisons in the 17th and 18th century began to include large spaces to lecture on any number of topics from temperance to Christianity. In Fig 8, Foucault shows a series of wooden pods of two in a lecture hall type space at Fresnes Prison. These wood pods are completely enclosed other than a small space for the head to view out. The image is entitled “Lecture on the evils of alcoholism in the auditorium of Fresnes Prison.”⁸ It was throughout this period where specific architectures from solitary confinement cells, lecture halls, and other such spaces were introduced into the

5 Johnston, Norman B. 1964. John Haviland, Jailor to the World. *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 23 (No. 2): 101-105.

6 Johnston, 101.

7 Cooper, Robert Alan. 1979. The English Quakers and Prison Reform 1809-1823. *Quaker History* 68 (no. 1): 3-19.

8 Foucault, Michel. 1978. *Discipline & Punish*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Random House Inc. 169-170.

broader design of prisons.

An architecture of incarceration that predates the 17th and 18th century especially is the English Workhouse. The English Workhouse is rooted in the Poor Law Act of 1388 which was meant to address the labor shortages produced by the Black Plague.⁹ The law from the beginning was meant to control of the labor of the worker, through a series of laws that prevented the free movement of workers along with introducing laws that criminalized vagrancy. The workhouse is not unique to just England but seen throughout Europe, but the English Workhouse are the most infamous.

English workhouses reached their zenith physically and cultural during the Victorian Era. The workhouses of this era were not just for the destitute but also for people who had committed small crimes of desperation, or even orphans. Famous English writer Charles Dickens would often make the workhouse the focus of his ire. The workhouse was often the villain of many of his stories. Whether that is *Oliver Twist*, *the Life and Times of Nicholas Nickleby*, or others it was either stated or heavily implied that the “orphanages” were of then just workhouses where they would send orphaned kids. Bentham was not just interested in Panopticon’s but viewed the workhouse as a type of reform, “Bentham stipulated that all poor would come under one central authority that relief would only be granted on admittance to a workhouse.”¹⁰ Bentham’s view of the workhouse as a savior for the orphaned, or destitute is shown throughout the British Empire. Various Poor Law Commissions were established around the empire, in an 1839 report, *Fifth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners: with Appendices...To the Administration of the Irish Poor Relief Act*.¹¹ It is well established that they labor produced from from the poor was financially very important for the Empire. The workhouse was sold as being “nurturing and restrictive,” both as a means of control, but also a means of reformation. But in the end it proved a lu-

9 Brain, Jessica. 2019. *The Victorian Workhouse*. Historic UK. Auguste 8. <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/Victorian-Workhouse/>.

10 Stokes, Peter M. 2001. *Bentham, Dickens, and the Uses of the Workhouse*. *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 41 (no. 4): 712.

11 Ireland. Poor Law Commission Office. 1839. *Fifth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners: with Appendices...To the Administration of the Irish Poor Relief Act*. London: Ireland, Poor Law Commission Office.

crative means of controlling the labor of the most unfortunate in society.

The act of controlling the labor of the individual, draws very direct connections to slavery, specifically the slavery produced by European colonial actors during the age of colonization. Whether it was the architectures produced to take people from their homes in West Africa, to sell those people across the Americas, or to hold their position as other like in the Thomas Jeffersons Monticello. Although the structures of slavery in the United States greatly impact the contemporary incarceration structures, I am interested in the way in which people were transported via the North Atlantic Slave Trade. The slave ship *Brookes* depicts the conditions for how people were “stored.”¹² The plan depicts the extent that people will go to not just enslave another person but solely focused on the profitability of every aspect of its systems. From the slave ship as a means for holding someone against their will the use of prison ships. Prison ships known as prison hulks or convict-ships function in many ways. In the late 18th century as incarceration systems were rapidly expanding a question of where to place people even when there was not an available prison cell. The prison hulk which like many of these architectures that grew out of the England often were refabricated military ships, or even slave ships that would store people in near inhumane circumstances, “The carceral, with its long gradation stretching from the convict ship or imprisonment with hard labour to diffuse, slight limitations, communicates a type of power justice that the law validates and that uses as its favourite weapon.”¹³ Foucault brings up the way in which “convict-ships” both physically controlled the individual and controlled their labor. Beyond acting as overflow prisons they would often be moored near large construction projects where labor was needed. This position of removing the sedentary prison as the means for incarceration or a classic prison complex would see itself become a more standard part of the carceral system up through the present day.

Incarceration systems in the United States hold many responsibilities for controlling individuals and communities. A significant portion of contemporary incarceration complexes is built on labor exploitation, The ACLU lays it out clearly, “From the moment they enter the prison gates, incarcerated people lose the right to refuse to work. This is because the

12 1839. Plan of Slave Ship *Brookes*. University of California, San Diego.

13 Foucault, 302.

13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution...”¹⁴ This is because prison labor is a key to state systems of control and capitalist economic structure. Though contemporary Prison systems may not follow designs of control laid out by Bentham, Haviland, and Bouleé; control is the bedrock for how the contemporary prison systems are constructed. It is done through similar methods for psychological control along with the reality of modern technology.

Where aspects of Intentions around control and very much tie into Brett Story *Fire Camp, Highways, Coal Mine: Geographies of the Carceral Quotidian*. “These sites can be viewed as external geographies of a sprawling prison regime whose operation is increasingly central to the functioning of the neoliberal Capitalist State”¹⁵ Story highlights the importance of labor exploitation in the contemporary carceral systems in the United States, that in many cases the carceral systems are constructed for labor exploitation. Story highlights the fire camps that pop up near wildfires across the state of California. California’s ability to fight wildfires rest on prison labor, “A Prison firefighter might be deployed for months at a time, moving up and down the state from San Diego all the way to the Oregon Boarder. They might spend twenty-four hours at a time on a fire, earning, on average, \$1 an hour for each spent on the line”¹⁶ It is estimated that exploiting the labor of incarcerated people save the state tens of millions of dollars. With these prisons are mobile systems of control through a series of physical sites and “fire camps” which function like prison hulks, incarcerating people close to where their labor value has importance. Story goes into to exemplify other instances of labor exploitation across the US carceral system.

Contemporary carceral systems across the world incorporate aspects of types of Labor, Reform, and Control. But the focus of the United States Carceral systems is firmly on labor. These systems use reform or remediation to justify the exploitation of incarcerated persons’ labor. Control is a central facet in how incarcerated peoples labor is exploited. The architectures of incarceration have a central focus on labor exploita-

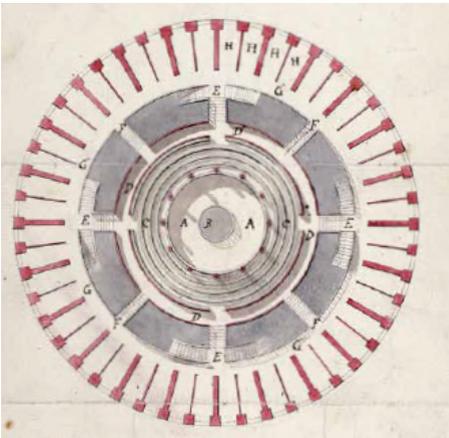
14 ACLU.

15 Story, Brett. 2020. *Fire Camp, Highways, Coal Mine: Geographies of the Carceral Quotidian* In *On the Architectures of Carcerality*, edited by Isabelle Kirkham-Lewitt, 213. New York , New York: Columbia University Press.

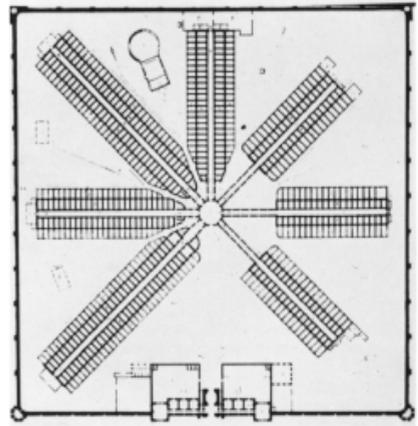
16 Story, 219.

tion. The different types of prisons in the 18th and 19th centuries weave a typology of the architectures of incarceration that are the foundation of the contemporary incarceration systems that exist with the purpose of labor exploitation.

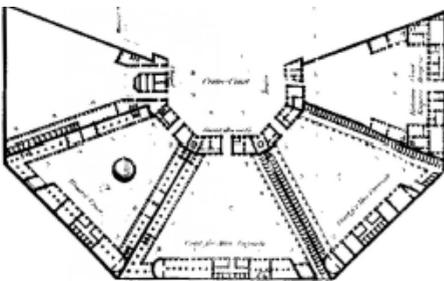
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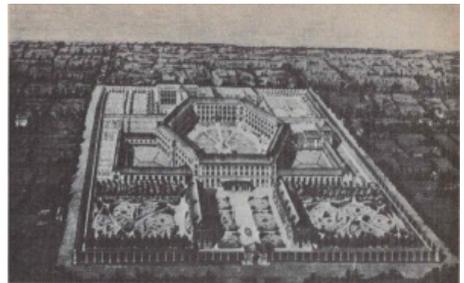
Panopticon



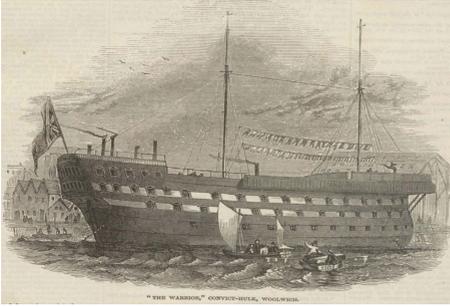
Eastern State Penitentiary



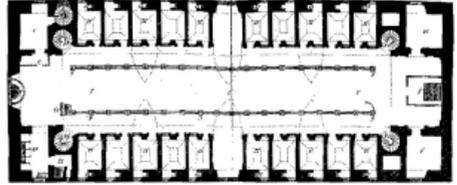
Maison de Force



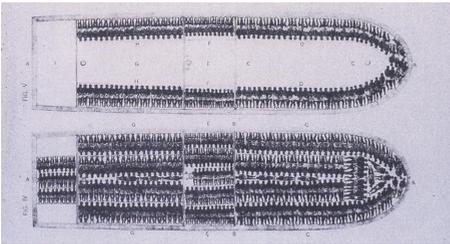
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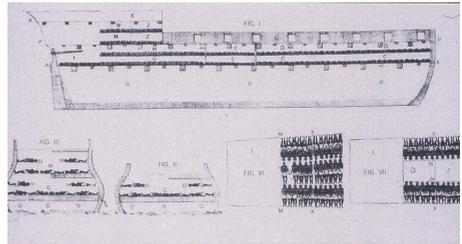
Prison Hulk "The Warrior"



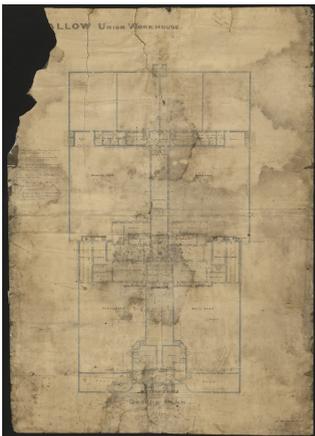
San Michele Boys Prison



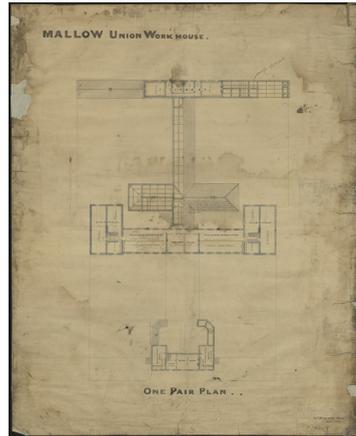
Slave Ship Brookes



Slave Ship Brookes



Mallow Union Workhouse



Mallow Union Workhouse

