



James, Joy (ed.), *Warfare in the American Homeland : Policing and Prison in a Penal Democracy*

Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2007, 351 pp. , ISBN 978 08223 3923 6.

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- 1 According to some observers of the 'American scene', much that once characterized it as good changed dramatically after the bombing of the Twin Towers, 9/11/2001. Since then it has been said that the country has given up much of its respect and sanctity of privacy, its emphasis and adherence to individual autonomy, its pursuit of peace, due process and liberalism in general. For observers with these opinions, the United States is now hardly recognizable from just a few years ago. Surveillance, off-the-scale imprisonment, extraordinary and unnecessary imprisonment, xenophobia, grid locked government, and state-sponsored torture are for them the new descriptors of the 'land of the free.'
- 2 Others have rejected this description as unfair and inaccurate. They point to the election of Obama, the nation's first African-American, and assert that the country is now in a post-race era where tolerance and a wider acceptance of 'others' is just the latest indication that America's largeness remains largely unchanged since 9/11.
- 3 In early 2010 this positive perspective was bolstered by the news federal legislation endorsing national health care – a significant legislative accomplishment by Obama

that had eluded presidents for more than seventy-five years – as evidence that the nation is increasingly a compassionate citizen-oriented country.

- 4 This interpretation was severely tarnished during the 2010 summer. High profile race-baiting blog/journalists (and commentators), for example, posted a selectively edited speech by a female African-American federal employee that inaccurately depicted her as a racist who discriminated against a poor white farmer. Without checking the facts the bumbling Obama administration fired the woman, only to soon apologize for their errors. This incident was almost immediately followed by a number of high profile politicians, including former presidential candidate Senator John McCain, who called for the repeal of 19th century juristic reasoning that give American citizenship to anyone born within its borders. The proposed change was aimed at American-born children of illegal immigrants. These incidents – and others including highly politicized objections to a new mosque that has been approved to be built near the 9/11 attack site – in no uncertain way revealed an ugly underbelly within the United States that, except perhaps for the most observant, has remained largely hidden since the early days of jubilation that celebrated the hope for change when Obama took office as President.
- 5 The book reviewed here is a timely antidote to the idea that the United States has entered a post-discriminatory age, especially within its criminal justice system. Drawing on what was originally the name of the Soviet government agency that administered its forced penal labor camps, made famous by Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* (1973), today these same words are used by Amnesty International's director and others to describe what the editor of this anthology and many of the contributors see as tendencies within the United States toward developing total control over a number of groups of disenfranchised people including poor people, people of color, women, queers and the incarcerated.
- 6 Based on fifteen entries from diverse sources and organized in two large sections (I. Insurgent Knowledge and II: Policing and Prison Technologies), the book contains only five original contributions. The other pieces are from a pantheon of original thinkers on repression and human exploitation. These include among others, Michel Foucault on the assassination of George Jackson in San Quentin Prison (1970), George Jackson on imprisonment, Oscar Lopez Rivera on Puerto Rican resistance to colonialism, Dylan Rodriguez on the ship passage of slaves, and Laura Whitehorn – self-described political prisoner who spent over fourteen years in federal prison.
- 7 According to James, collectively the chapters examine the sensibilities and structures that enable a police and penal democracy to survive, an assessment that I share. The reprinted material will be familiar to older, mature scholars already familiar with academic, journalistic and autobiographical accounts of repression and resistance as central elements of policing and prisons. For readers just becoming interested in these topics the book is a valuable and very timely resource. It will shed some understanding on the inherent contradictions that exist in the political structure of the United States, including President Obama's commitment to hope and change while approving increased federal expenditures for new prisons because they will provide jobs. This book deserves to be in every library in the world where there is an interest in the United States' criminal justice system.

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