



Carceral apartheid: how lies and white supremacists run our prisons

Brittany Friedman, United States of America, The University of North Carolina Press, 2025, 205 pp., \$27.29 (paperback), ISBN 9781469683409

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BOOK REVIEW

Carceral apartheid: how lies and white supremacists run our prisons, Brittany Friedman, United States of America, The University of North Carolina Press, 2025, 205 pp., \$27.29 (paperback), ISBN 9781469683409

Brittany Friedman's (2025) *Carceral Apartheid: How Lies and White Supremacists Run Our Prisons*, broadly examines how the U.S. prison system is underpinned by whiteness. By drawing on archival data and original interviews with founders of Black political movements, Friedman traces the history of mass incarceration in the United States, and explores how its growth has been maintained through ongoing forms of anti-Black oppression and violence. Friedman's work is rooted in the idea of 'carceral apartheid', which is conceptualized as 'the carceral foundation of US empire domestically and international ... state governing through the deployment of official carceral apparatuses (i.e., police ... courts, jails) to achieve the imperial management, division, and decimation of racialized, target populations' (Friedman, 2025, 5–6). Moreover, Friedman maintains that carceral apartheid occurs at the institutional (macro), organizational (meso), and individual (micro) level(s), through official, clandestine, and extra-legal controls. Through an exploration of different Black resistance movements historically, particularly, the Black Guerilla Family, and George Jackson, Friedman outlines various state tactics used to harm, maim, and murder Black people within and beyond prison walls. Friedman's work argues that the 'weaponization of racial categories' has been used to justify practices such as gladiator fights (organized by correctional staff), wherein white prisoners were [often] armed with weapons to use against Black prisoners, physically and sexually assaulting and/ or raping Black prisoners, and other forms of state sanctioned violence used against Black prisoners to remind them of an established racial and social order.

Friedman's work offers a timely and [urgently] needed perspective given the current political climate [particularly in the United States], amongst ongoing cases of everyday citizens, activists, and political leaders being wrongfully imprisoned, particularly when speaking out against the policies and actions of the current administration. This work is also important in contributing to discussions on social movements such as Black Lives Matter and Free Palestine where Black and racialized peoples' have been targeted, criminalized, and subjected to the erasure of their histories and voices. Moreover, this text helps provide an important reminder that fascism extends beyond the criminalization and incarceration of certain peoples in a 'traditional' sense, but can also be understood in different ways, such as through removing funding for schools and universities who offer/ support certain types of study, or through spreading misinformation such as claiming the existence of a genocide against white farmers in South Africa.

Friedman's work also raises an important and often underdiscussed (or entirely neglected) issue around sexual assault experienced by [Black] men. Within the text there is a brief reference to the work of Frantz Fanon, but a deeper link can be made to his work regarding the hypersexualization of Black men by white men and women. Fanon argues that Black men, who are perceived as being sexually promiscuous and sexual predators, are believed to fornicate everywhere and prey on white women; in the past Black men *found* guilty of sleeping with white women were castrated (Fanon, 2008, 135; Davis, 1983). According to Fanon, white men believe that the 'Negro' has a hallucinating sexual power. Fanon argues that Black men's sexuality is perceived as being so innately tied to their very being, that Black men are fixated at the

genital level, or rather have been fixated there, and therefore Black men represent a biological danger (Fanon, 2008, 143). This idea is highlighted in Friedman's work in the treatment and assault/ rape of any Black men who received visits from a white woman while in prison, as it was believed that those women were coerced and/ or in danger, or that those men needed to be 'reminded of their place'.

While Friedman largely offers an historical analysis, providing more connection to the current system of mass incarceration in the United States, the use of solitary confinement, labour, mandatory minimums, and how white supremacy functions throughout various policies and practices would help better situate the importance of the archival data Friedman examined. Although the reader can draw parallels from the historical context to the contemporary context themselves, those without prior knowledge may have difficulty in tracing this history onto the modern prison system.

Overall, Brittany Friedman's *Carceral Apartheid: How Lies and White Supremacists Run Our Prisons*, is an important contribution to prison studies, stories of resistance within the United States prison system, and Black political movements. Additionally, given the current United States and global context, this text offers a timely intervention about fascist regimes and white supremacy, state sanctioned violence, anti-Black racism, and the spread of misinformation by governments.

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