Carcerality and Indigeneity: the roots of ‘Indian territory’ and Settler society in North America

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Background

- Katherine McKittrick (2011) on the “plantations, prisons, projects” narrative of Black geography in America
- Various studies (ex. Moritz 2013, Martin 2012) on multiple spaces of detention, surveillance and control with respect to migrants/refugees
- Nichols (2014) on ‘insufficient attention’ to Indigenous sovereignty in prison studies.
- Clearly carcerality produces spatial spectrums along lines of race and positionality with respect to territory – what effect does carceral space designed for indigeneity have, how is it materialised?
• Settler colonialism seeks to remove Indigenous bodies from the land
• Combination of physical and narrative removal (ie: invasion and ‘terra nullius’ myth go hand in hand)
• As historians such as Alan Lester and Zoe Laidlaw have noted, settler colonialism also creates and maintains spaces for indigeneity – a paradox?
• Contention: analysing “Indian territory” through lens of carcerality helps make sense of this
• Official ‘First Nations’ territory
• Created by various means – treaties, ‘land grants’, acts of parliament
• In Canada, Consolidated under Department of Indian Affairs in early 20th century
• In USA, moved from Dept. of War to Dept. of Interior in 1849
• Federal land – First Nations administer but do not own property
• Often isolated, impoverished

Reserves in Canada – note many are northern/isolated, fewer in heavily settled south
(public use of map via Natural Resources Canada)
Related Spaces: Schools & Prisons

Residential & Industrial schools
- Mandatory schooling system for Indian children in both Canada and USA
- Designed to assimilate
- Active in Canada until 1996, some USA schools still open

Prisons & Indigenous People
- Indigenous people incarcerated 7-8 times the rate of Settler Canadians
- 30x as many Indigenous people in prison per 1000 individuals
- Indigenous women make up fastest growing prison population – 33.6% of federal sentences for women
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**Rates of ‘Aboriginal’ vs. ‘non-Aboriginal’ incarceration in Canada (per 1000 individuals) – 2006 Canadian census**
19th century: creation of interlocking system of carceral spaces
- Prisons (official) and residential schools (unofficial) recognized as carceral
- Reserve and urban ghettos also function according to carceral logics, but not examined as such
- Settler state forces Indigenous people to move from one incarceration to the next
• Starvation tactics used to force Indigenous communities onto reserves (James Daschuk, 2013)
• Indian Agents control movement – preview contemporary surveillance by RCMP & FBI
• Withholding of rations/starvation experiments
• Spread of diseases (TB, influenza) among vulnerable
• Starvation as discipline – ‘forced dependency’ creates docile bodies

A sample pass from the Duck Lake Agency (Saskatchewan), 1952 – the ‘Pass System’ was a policy (not law) that allowed Indian Agents to micromanage the movements of Indigenous people (via Prof. Shauneen Pete: http://www.uregina.ca/external/communications/feature-stories/current/2015/fs-11182015.html)
## Violent Confinement

### In Residential Schools

- Residential schools were also very violent – physical punishment for speaking own language and similar – subjecting Indigenous people to state violence in spaces of education and ‘reform’.

### On Reserves

- Police forces like ‘the Mounties’ enforced the pass system, took children for residential schools or foster homes, and spearheaded invasions – and racialised police violence continues today.
Carceral ‘Churn’ & Colonial Elimination

Opportunities to assimilate/“reform” = narrative elimination (‘enfranchisement’, etc.)

Reserve → ‘In care’ → Prison → Urban Ghetto

Bodily death & social absence

“Go back where you came from!”
Indigenous people escape carceral systems in several ways:

– Literal escape
– Education/social mobility
– Suicide (embodied act of resistance)
– Contemporary returns to “the land”

By mid-20th century urban centres like Vancouver and Minneapolis boast large Indigenous populations – new frontiers in settler colonialism...?
Further Questions

• What can the carcerality of ‘Indian territory’ tell us about neoliberal prisons designed for lives not valued even as labour?
• How does Indigenous carcerality relate to the ability to settle and move unfree labour across space?
• How are Settler identities co-produced along with carceral Indian territory?

Thank you!
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All questions and comments welcomed!