

## *Carceral Capitalism (2018)*

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# READING PROJECT

 ALLIANCE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN PRISON

## Introduction

- How do neoliberal policies affect the public and private sector? Where does Wang position the status of police (and policing) in the contemporary era?
- What can we learn from the interrelatedness of the economy, policing, and municipal finance, especially in light of the 2008 crisis?
- Wang believes that 'predatory lending' and 'parasitic governance' (carried out through five different, and yet connected, techniques) are the two pillars of racial capitalism. How are the logics of 'disposability' and 'exploitability' at play in this scenario?
- How do mass incarceration, the debt economy, and the post-work society intertwine?

## Chapter 1: Racialized Accumulation by Dispossession in the Age of Finance Capital: Notes on the Debt Economy

- How could we define 'primitive accumulation' in Marx's thought and Luxemburg's later critique?
- Wang extends Harvey's argument by coining the expression 'racialized accumulation by dispossession'. While Native dispossession "occurs through the expropriation of *land*", black dispossession is characterized by "enslavement and *bodily* dispossession" (116). How does dispossession bleed into the debt economy?
- Which racial groups are affected the most by predatory student loans? How does their debt preclude employment after college, and what type of control did lenders have over borrowers?
- How is the category of 'risk' racialized, in Wang's analysis?

## Chapter 2: Policing as Plunder: Notes on Municipal Finance and the Political Economy of Fees and Fines

- What is the 'vampiric' example Wang alludes to when describing the relationships between municipal governments and the public?
- How is the case of Detroit paradigmatic in Wang's analysis of the financialization of municipalities?
- What is Marx's M-C-M financial formula? How is it applied to labor power and capitalism?
- How does James O'Connor frame the 'kapitalistate'? What are the ways in which the state legitimizes capitalism through accumulation?
- What are the effects of the parasitic relationship established by municipalities on black life?

## Chapter 3: "Packing Guns Instead of Lunches": Biopower and Juvenile Delinquency

- How is biopolitics useful to understand juvenile delinquency (especially in relation to the construction of the so-called 'superpredator')?
- How is juvenile delinquency perceived and portrayed in the public conception?
- Why are DiIulio statements so crucial in understanding the myth of the 'superpredator', and for the overall arc of this chapter?
- Which laws are still affected by this myth, and how can biopolitics help us grasp the mechanism behind "these political operations"?

## Chapter 4: “This Is a Story About Nerds and Cops”: PredPol and Algorithmic Policing

- a. What movement in 2011 brought to light the violent militarization of police? How did militarization challenge the legitimacy of law enforcement?
- b. How and why does predictive policing rely on big data?
- c. The rise of uncertainty, in the work of the Tiquun collective, is tightly linked to the rise of cybernetics. How does PredPol appeal to the desire for “certitude and knowledge about the future”? And how does it fail?
- d. Why does paranoia play a role in predictive policing? What is the ideological foundation for PredPol?

## Chapter 5: The Cybernetic Cop: RoboCop and the Future of Policing<sup>1</sup>

- a. How are Wang’s personal memories intertwined with a reflection on the future of policing? Which particular object from her childhood sparks the narrative offered in this piece?
- b. RoboCop possesses a face, and this seems to stride with the method of surveillance we experience on a daily basis. What does Wang mean when she claims that “the cybernetic cop has no face”?
- c. What is the difference between a mirror and a display? What example does Wang provide for illustrating this distinction?
- d. What is Tiquun’s definition of ‘sabotage’?

## Chapter 6: Against Innocence: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Safety

- a. How does the murder of Isaiah Simmons generate Wang’s reflection on the politics of innocence? And how is innocence framed as an “appeal to the white imaginary”?
- b. Why is the notion of ‘black exceptionalism’ used to dismantle antiracist struggles?
- c. Black women absorb the social crisis generated by the penal state. Reflect upon the racialized, gendered, and class patterns highlighted by Wang when analyzing the carceral state, inside and outside of prisons.
- d. This chapter uses the category of space to analyze whiteness, the invisibility of prisons, and the liberal imperative to create ‘personal safety’ and ‘comfort’ during conversations that should instead foster discomfort and risk. How did this chapter make you rethink, or reevaluate, your notions of political circles, activism, and revolution?

## Chapter 7: The Prison Abolitionist Imagination: A Conversation

- a. Why does Wang switch genres when approaching the topic of prison abolition? How does poetry capture the imagination necessary to overcome the “realism of the Present”?
- b. Reflect upon Rosa Luxemburg’s letter (304-306) to her comrade Sophie Liebknecht, and on the sensory horizon it creates through language.
- c. Why do stars occupy such a fundamental role in the imagination of incarcerated subjects (most notably, in the words of the men who participated in the Attica uprising, in 1971)?
- d. What are the politics of dreaming, in Wang’s thought?

<sup>1</sup> The video for this piece, ideated as a multimedia performance, can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bUbQh8HegLU>.