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“Discipline and its Discontents”**

Abstracts (written in English or French) should be sent to the workshop organizers by January 28, 2019

Workshop 17

Foucault, discipline and the U.S. penal and carceral history

Co-chaired by Simon Grivet (Université de Lille) & Yohann Le Moigne (Université d'Angers)

Michel Foucault maintained a close relationship with the United States. Invited to deliver a seminar at the University of Buffalo (New York) in 1970, he had regular stays, especially in California, from 1975 to the time of his death in 1984. This period corresponded to the publication in French of *Discipline and Punish* (quickly translated in English), a book which brought forward the appealing but somewhat mysterious rise of “discipline” to explain the western predominance of prison in the western economy of punishment from the 19th century on¹. To the question “Why prison?”, he offered answers which allowed a radical reconsideration of the question of social control. The choice of prison resulted from a will to render the State’s control invisible. For Foucault, the goal was to “unveil and analyze how the various disciplinary devices communicated, devices whose aim it was to generalize the punitive function in the social sphere”². In this perspective, one of the principal functions of prison is to “create delinquency” and impose the figure of the delinquent as a counter-model so as to justify a larger control of populations³. However, prison as theorized in the 19th century was not meant to exclude deviants. To the contrary it was contemplated as a tool to rationalize behaviors: transforming individuals by restoring the inmate’s morality according to the dominant social order.

Foucault’s book was published at a time of intense mobilization for the prisoners’ emancipation (San Quentin, the Attica riot in the U.S., several mutinies in France supported by the creation of the Prison Information Group, etc.), a context which also informed the publication of several important historical works on the same topic by scholars such as David J. Rothman or Michael Ignatieff⁴.

¹ The book was published by Gallimard in 1975, then translated in English by A. Sheridan and published by Vintage in 1977.

² Jean-François Bert, « ‘Ce qui résiste, c’est la prison.’ Surveiller et punir, de Michel Foucault », *Revue du MAUSS*, 2012/2 (n°40), p. 161-172

³ Frédéric Gros, « Foucault et ‘la société punitive’ », *Pouvoirs*, vol. 135, Issue 4, 2010, pp. 5-14.

⁴ David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum, Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic*, [1st., Boston, Little, 1971, 376 p. ; Michael Ignatieff, *A just measure of pain: the penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850*, Columbia University Press morningside ed., New York, Columbia University Press, 1980, 257 p. Rothman wrote a critical yet admiring review of *Discipline and Punish* for the *New York Times* in February 1978.

Since that time, Foucault's theories about discipline have never ceased to be used, discussed and debated by social scientists working on the U.S. justice and prison systems⁵. Foucault now belongs to the same mandatory canon when studying crime and punishment together with Marx, Durkheim or Weber⁶.

Meanwhile, the U.S. carceral system underwent major transformations with the development of a prison industrial complex characterized by the emergence of private actors supposedly offering more efficient services to relieve the State of some of the costs of mass incarceration. After the publication of Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* in 2010, several other works confirmed that mass incarceration was disproportionately affecting minorities (mainly African Americans and Latinos)⁷.

Almost half a century after *Discipline and Punish*, this panel would like to question the pertinence of Foucault's vision of discipline to analyze and explain justice and prison in the United States, from both a historical and contemporary perspective.

We will welcome contributions in history, American studies, sociology, geography or anthropology which offer a critical dialogue between research on the U.S. justice and carceral system, and Michel Foucault's work.

The following questions are of special interest to us:

- Does Foucault's thesis of the rise of discipline still make sense today to explain the birth of the prison in the antebellum United States?
- How can we update Foucault's ideas in the wake of some of the evolutions impacting the U.S. judicial and carceral system since the 1970s such as mass incarceration or the continuing use of the death penalty?
- Can we compare the project of transforming individuals defended by 19th century prison advocates to today's practice of mass incarceration? Does the goal remain to transform inmates' behavior in order to curb recidivism or is it to definitely marginalize some categories while making comfortable profits?
- *Discipline and punish* questioned the necessity and the inexorability of incarceration as a punishment and a corrective tool. How does American society fare when it comes to elaborate alternative means of incarceration and more generally which criticism(s) of prison can we find in the U.S. ?
- Finally, we would also be interested in proposals analyzing prison as a place of political awareness and resistance to power (from George Jackson's letters at the end of the 1960s⁸ to the strikes launched in many American prisons in August 2018) or as an object to question the dominant social and racial order.

Please send your proposal (500 words in French or English) with a short bio to Simon Grivet (simon.grivet@univ-lille.fr) and Yohann Le Moigne (yohann.lemoigne@univ-angers.fr).

⁵ See for instance Michael Meranze, *Laboratories of virtue: punishment, revolution, and authority in Philadelphia, 1760-1835*, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1996, 338 p.

⁶ David Garland, *Punishment and Modern Society: A Study in Social Theory*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1990, 312 p.

⁷ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, The New Press, 2010, 312 p. ; Heather Ann Thompson, "Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History", *Journal of American History*, Volume 97, Issue 3, 2010, Pages 703–734; John Pfaff, *Locked in: the True Causes of Mass Incarceration and How to Achieve Real Reform*, Basic Books, 2017, 320 p.; James Forman Jr, *Locking up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017, 320 p.

⁸ George Jackson, *Soledad Brother. The Prison Letters of George Jackson*, Lawrence Hill Books, 1994, 339 p.