

PLANTATIONS, PRISONS, AND PSYCHIATRICS: ON THE CRIMINALIZATION OF MENTAL ILLNESS

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Background: This presentation examines the historical development of the confluence of the psychiatric and penal systems in the United States. It focuses on two phases of mass incarceration: the periods following the Emancipation of the slaves and the de-institutionalization of the asylums and State psychiatric hospitals. Divergently different ideologies merged to locate the mentally ill and the criminal, with different needs and distinct populations, within the criminal justice system.

Issues of Focus: This trans-institutionalization continues to be an important concern in American society today. Paying particular attention to the role of race and ethnicity, class, and gender that provide frameworks for understanding the social and psychological implications of this conflation of institutions, I pay particular attention to the consequences of the criminalization of mental illness for marginalized communities.

Potential Outcomes: I consider the contemporary conflicting prison movements of Reformation and Abolition. In addition I investigate the current Defund the Police, Black Lives Matter, and Stop Asian Hate movements as responses that implicate and challenge the systemic racism that is manifest in American criminal justice systems today.

Methods/Proposition: Through a historical, cultural, and political examination and analysis the dynamics of the intersectionality concerning the criminalization of mental illness, I present the visual and historical documents of this troubling issue.

Discussion/Implications: Attentive to the Constitutional and global human rights models and documents that are available to these imprisoned populations, this study explores the possibilities and opportunities for social and political change.

Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Participants will be able to identify two specific historical periods and the political crises of those periods that contributed to the criminalization of mental illness today
2. Participants will be able to identify the Constitutional Amendments and global human rights documents that are relevant to the rights of imprisoned populations.