

Against Equality: Prisons Will Not Protect You. Edited by Ryan Conrad. Lewiston, ME: Against Equality Press, 2012; pp. 114, \$10.00 paper.

A white, gay-identified Florida teen, Kaitlyn Hunt, 18, faces felony charges for “lewd and lascivious battery of a child 12 to 16,” after the parents of her 15-year-old girlfriend pressed charges against her in February 2013. The support for Hunt has been overwhelming and cries of homophobia have been the central rallying point of her defenders; however, some have argued that this is not an issue of homophobia, but rather the consequence of antiquated sex-offender laws. In reality, it is both. LGBTQ folks have a long history of marginalization under the law as sexual minorities and deviants. This issue has become obscured by the mainstream LGBT movement’s focus on legal inclusion through marriage, the military, and protective legislation such as hate crime laws (HCL). *Against Equality: Prisons Will Not Protect You* (PWNPY) is the third book in the Against Equality collective’s series. All three books take the mainstream strategy of “inclusion” to task. This short and concise pocket-sized book is ten chapters full of a deeply critical and timely analysis that is engaged with two main themes: queer critiques of HCL and queer critiques of sex-crime laws.

Dean Spade’s introduction captures the central paradox of PWNPY: How do queers, trans folks, and people of color hold the criminal (in)justice system accountable for the violence done on and through their bodies when that very system is charged with preventing harm and violence in the first place? Spade explores the ways that LGBTQ individuals and organizations have turned to HCL as a way not only to ensure their safety but also to secure their full and equal citizenship under the law. Acknowledging that violence is a real and legitimate concern, Spade argues that the deeply ingrained notion that law enforcement and the criminal punishment system will provide the safety that queers need is false and premised on key cultural myths about *who* are the victims and perpetrators of violence, and who gets punished and imprisoned for violence. According to Spade, these myths need to be acknowledged and dispelled in order to create real safety and accountability. Citing the work of queer and trans activists, whose

work is explored further in the anthology, Spade offers tangible and tested strategies for resisting the current criminal punishment system. In particular, Spade also offers a philosophical shift: to change the way we create and believe in enemies, and to understand banishment and exile as ill-fated solutions to the problems that we all face as people who create and face harm daily. Spade pushes us to imagine what it would look like to create a world where we can prevent and address harm without “throwing people away or putting them in cages” (10).

A collection of previously published materials from personal blogs to *Alternet*, the essays range from in-depth explorations of specific cases to organizational statements against HCL. One drawback of this anthology of archival material is at times a repetition of analysis; however, I will draw out major themes and arguments here. The first part of the anthology, and therefore this review, deal with HCL. Writing for *Black & Pink*, an organization of LGBTQ prisoners and allies, Jason Lydon provides a comprehensive list of major themes in critiques of HCL all gleaned from radical, queer, anti-racist feminist organizations whose work focuses on dismantling the criminal punishment system. Lydon argues that HCL do not distinguish between marginalized groups and groups with institutional power. This means that the language of HCL makes it possible for white people to accuse people of color of hate crimes, and likewise straight people can accuse queers of hate crimes (14). In addition, Lydon notes that hate crimes occur because we live in a culture that deems certain lives are more valuable than others, not because there aren't enough laws to stop them from happening. When organizations put resources into passing HCL it takes away from the deeper and more transformative work of shifting the way we think about those who are different than ourselves, and the way we as a culture treat those who have harmed us (16). Likewise, Jack Aponte argues hate crime legislation does not include an analysis of power and that attacking a few of the symptoms of hatred while leaving a culture of violence untouched won't do anything to change the severity or occurrences of hate crimes (38).

Originally writing for *Alternet*, Lilitiana Segura demonstrates that there is little statistical proof to show that tougher sentencing laws prevent violent crimes against minority groups. Segura argues that HCL evoke the same tired “tough on crime” discourses, but packaged for liberal sensibilities (34). Yasmin Nair's essay makes a number of important inroads into queer critiques of the criminal punishment system. She argues that through the prison industrial complex, the political left seeks an easy solution to the myriad problems that have been caused by the violence of neoliberalism (42). People are vulnerable not just because they are perceived to be members of a marginalized group but also because of economic status. Nair argues that often the only way for marginalized groups to

gain recognition is through incorporation into the law, but she challenges us to think what real accountability might look like.

The last few chapters focus on the queer critiques of sex-crime laws. James D'Entremont argues that queer people intersect with the criminal punishment system in many ways; however, when a member of the LGBTQ community is *accused* of a crime, the community falls silent. In working exclusively for victims, the mainstream LGBT community has helped to strengthen a system that has nurtured homophobia and punished sexual minorities (79). Erica R. Meiners, Liam Michaud, Josh Pavan, and Bridget Simpson argue that the mainstream LGBT community moved away from issues of criminalization because they were no longer considered the “worst of the worst” of sexually deviant peoples. Meiners and her colleagues argue that “sexual deviants” (i.e., sex workers and HIV positive folks) have been pushed further to the margins as mainstream LGBT organizations have achieved inclusion. As Meiners and her colleagues maintain, sex-offender registries propagate the policing of all sexually marginalized people because they increase everyday anxieties about sexual deviance, and they are a “soft extension’ of the prison industrial complex into everyday life” (82). These anxieties also push us to collude with the racist and heteronormative logics of the state. Ultimately, Meiners and her colleagues contend that the shared history between queers and sex offenders needs to be acknowledged, not to romanticize a notion of “sexual outlaws,” but because both groups share a history that is intertwined with the expansion of the carceral state.

An important tool for teachers, students, activists, and lay people, *Against Equality: Prisons Will Not Protect You* is critically important to our current cultural moment and will resonate for years to come. The push for inclusion via marriage, the military, and hate crime legislation by the mainstream LGBT movement is ubiquitous and remains largely unchallenged. Through this book, and the other two in the series, we access a much-needed critique of the harm caused by strategies of inclusion in its collusion with institutionalized power.

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