

Ep. 117 | Incarceration

[00:00:11] **Kendra** Hello, I'm Kendra Winchester, here with Jaclyn Masters. And this is Reading Women, a podcast inviting you to reclaim the bookshelf and read the world. Today, we're talking about books around this month's theme, which is Incarceration.

[00:00:25] **Jaclyn** And you can find a complete transcript of this episode on our website, readingwomenpodcast.com. And don't forget to subscribe so you don't miss a single episode.

[00:00:35] **Kendra** Well, it's a new month's theme and a new recording location for you. I feel like you have been the wandering podcaster.

[00:00:44] **Jaclyn** I feel like I've dialed in from so many different . . . like, I've dialed in from a different place every time we've done a recording this year, Kendra.

[00:00:53] **Kendra** But now you're back with your Yeti mic, and you have a little more permanent space. So that's really nice.

[00:01:01] **Jaclyn** Yeah, it's good to sort of have a little bit of a base again.

[00:01:05] **Kendra** Yeah, we are both, you know, nesters. So one hundred percent feel you. I am very excited to chat about our theme today. But per usual, we have some updates. So this month's update is that we are going to have, at the end of September, our Patreon Book Club. So for as little as one dollar, you can join our Patreon Book Club. We try to make it accessible to anyone who would like to join. And so this quarter's pick is BLACK WATER SISTER by Zen Cho. And this is the story of Jessamyn, who is a closeted queer woman who is moving back to Malaysia, which is a country she left when she was a toddler. And she kind of learns more about her family's history, including that her grandmother was a spirit medium. And so there's this avatar called the Black Water Sister. And it's like this ghost sort of story. You may remember Zen Cho from the SORCERER TO THE CROWN, which Autumn and I talked about a while ago. So I'm very excited to read more of Zen Cho's work. Yeah, I think it'll be pretty great.

[00:02:21] **Jaclyn** Sounds good.

[00:02:22] **Kendra** Yeah, we haven't done a fantasy book in a while. And another one of our picks from quarter two is actually one of my picks today. So I'll talk about that a little later. But if you'd like to join, you can follow the link in the show notes and head over to our Patreon. We have exclusive podcasts, newsletters, weekly updates with fur baby stuff. And it is fabulous. You know, the fur kids really take the cake, I think.

[00:02:50] **Jaclyn** They steal the show.

[00:02:52] **Kendra** They really do. They really do. And we have so many fur kids now as part of the team. So you get a little bit of . . . a little bit of everything. I guess now it's time to jump into September's theme. So, Jaclyn, you chose this month's theme. Would you like to talk a little bit about what kind of inspired you or made you start thinking about this theme to talk about on the podcast?

[00:03:19] **Jaclyn** So we're going to be looking at books on Incarceration this month. And that is a very, very broad theme. And, you know, full disclosure, we're only going to be able

to touch on a small amount. There is a huge amount of literature out there that you can read—fiction, nonfiction, lots of documentaries. This is really just to give you an idea about some of the things that we've been reading on the topic and some of the things that we've been sort of interested in. So there's obviously a very Australian focus with some of the things that I've been looking at. And I know, Kendra, a lot of the literature and sort of broader reading you've been looking at has had a disability focus. So I feel like we bring sort of our own interests to this topic as well.

[00:03:59] **Jaclyn** And we're going to have a list of resources in the show notes that you can click on for some further reading to give you a bit more context about, you know, those sort of backgrounds that we're bringing to it. And really to talk about some of the, I guess in my case, some of the more regionally specific things that I wanted to sort of touch on and flag for international listeners of the podcast. One of the key things that I really wanted to flag for listeners overseas about the discussion in Australia is the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody report that was handed down in the early '90s and made a whole list of recommendations. I think there was 339 to be specific. And a majority of them have not been implemented. And I'm going to link to a really great article by Amy McQuire that was in "The Washington Post" that really talks about a lot of this and looks at it from, you know, a more contemporary perspective about how, you know, the gaps in reform and what hasn't taken place since then. And one of them more recently, which a lot of people might have seen on social media, is this #RaiseTheAge campaign, which is looking at raising the age of criminal responsibility in Australia, which is currently at ten years old. So there was a whole campaign of people sharing photos of what they were like and what they were interested in when they were ten years old and flagging that these are children. These are children that are exposed to incarceration at such a young age.

[00:05:27] **Jaclyn** So I think seeing a lot of those, you know, really made me want to cover this theme and sort of, you know, read a lot more about it myself, but also to direct people to some of the resources that Kendra and I've come across. But yeah, Amy's article is fantastic. And she also talks about, sort of, the overrepresentation in prison populations of First Nations persons, you know, the statistics compared to the national population as well, which is just really striking. So I'd definitely recommend checking out that article as a really good sort of entry point to, you know, further reading as well.

[00:06:05] **Kendra** Another thing that we both came across is the lack of accessibility of literature around incarceration. As many of you know, I can only read via audio and finding audiobooks also for books outside of the US—so for books that look at different incarceration systems around the world—most of them are available only as e-book or in print. And I wasn't able to access those. And even books about disability and incarceration were not available on audio. And so a lot of the books that we gravitated towards were. . . . Part of that was because they were available on audio, and they were accessible to me. But I feel like the more we looked into it, the more of a gap there seems to be there. And wanting to learn more about other countries and trying to bring more international discussions to this topic, it was quite. . . quite the spot we found ourselves in in our research. And so I think it's really important to point out that we need more accessibility in this field, not just for audiobooks but for books to be available in other countries so that, you know, we're not just reading about America's system. It's important to read about America's system. But we should also be reading about other systems around the world and educating ourselves. But that's not always possible if we don't have access to the literature.

[00:07:26] **Jaclyn** And so conscious we're recording this during Women in Translation Month as well. And I'd say that there's an even sort of greater need for translated works on this topic to be available. And I think a lot of, certainly when I was looking into it, a lot of the presses that published a lot of books on incarceration and sort of adjacent topics were smaller presses. They were independent or university presses doing amazing work, but perhaps not, you know, resourced enough to have audio copies available. So, yeah, I would say if you are looking on this topic, I found Scribd an incredible resource for, sort of, you know, further recommendations after I'd read a title or just having e-books and audiobooks. I know certainly the discussion pick that I chose is not actually published in Australia, and I was able to listen to it via audio on Scribd. So, yeah, great resource, if you need a recommendation, then.

[00:08:17] **Kendra** Yeah. And as someone who really wants to read more about these topics, it was. . . . I always find it frustrating when I run into accessibility issues because of disability and wanting to read more about disability incarceration. So some of the titles that I could not access, I'm including in that resource list, and we'll talk about it later in the show. So I have not read them yet, but they are on my list, and I'm keeping an eye out for audiobooks if they ever become available. But you will be able to check those out if you are interested in those. But yeah, so that's why we have a lot of extra resources, is because we went through so many trying to find two books on audio that we would discuss and that we felt like hadn't, you know, already been in the public eye maybe as much or looking at different topics in a new way or, you know, it was a very. . . . I don't know. It was like. . . . I felt like we went back and forth a lot longer than we normally do, trying to find two books that would go well together but also were accessible to both of us.

[00:09:21] **Jaclyn** Yeah, it's. . . . I feel like the benefit of that is that people now have a great TBR list to get to. And hopefully, there's a range that are accessible whichever country you're reading in.

[00:09:31] **Kendra** That's very true. And we are happy also to have any recommendations. And so you can shoot those to us on Twitter (@thereadingwomen), via email, or on Instagram (@thereadingwomen). All of those contact links are below. We are happy to hear what you're reading as well. All right. Well, it's time to jump into our picks for this month. Jaclyn, you have the first one.

[00:09:53] **Jaclyn** I do. So the first book I wanted to talk about today is **BLACK AND BLUE: A MEMOIR OF RACISM AND RESILIENCE** by Veronica Gorrie. And this came out this year in Australia from Scribe. So Veronica Gorrie is a Gunai/Kurnai woman. And this is really a memoir of her growing up and raising her children, but also a real focus on her decade in the police force and a lot of really sort of direct discussions about her experiences, her personal experiences, of institutional sexism and racism and, you know, just a whole myriad of different experiences that she had with this. And I think it's relevant to this discussion about incarceration because—specifically what we'll talk about with our discussion books—but incarceration is more than just prison. It's sort of this broad web of carceral systems and things that feed into what ultimately is imprisonment for people. But certainly the police and the experience of that element of the justice system is a huge part of that discussion. So I really appreciated this sort of perspective specifically because, you know, as the blurb notes, Gorrie is one of the few Aboriginal police officers in Australia. Or she was, rather. She is not a police officer at the moment.

[00:11:12] **Jaclyn** What she shares in this book about sort of the overpolicing of different communities based on racial grounds, the abuses of power—I think this one really ties in

with Amy McQuire's "Washington Post" article that I mentioned earlier and really goes into some of those systemic issues with the justice system. And specifically in this case, I think it does a really interesting job of looking at colonialism and intergenerational trauma and how they have contributed to this current system and specifically looking at deaths in custody, the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in prison populations. There's so much in this. I found it a really, really moving read. So I highly recommend you checking that one out. So that one is BLACK AND BLUE: A MEMOIR OF RACISM AND RESILIENCE by Veronica Gorrie. That's out from Scribe here in Australia. And Kendra, what's the first book that you wanted to talk about today?

[00:12:11] **Kendra** So my first pick is FROM THE DESK OF ZOEY WASHINGTON by Janae Marks. And this is titled THE FARAWAY TRUTH in the UK. And this was one of our recent Patreon Book Club picks. And we had a great discussion. We talked for an hour about this book. And it's a middle grade. So I feel like that really illustrates the depth that this book has. So this book is about Zoey Washington. And when she was very young—I'm not even sure she was born yet—her biological father was arrested and charged with a crime. And he was then put into prison. Her parents, her biological father and her mother broke up. And then her mother eventually remarried her dad. And so Zoey grows up with a white stepfather who she views as her dad. And she's never had any contact with her biological father until she finds this letter from him on her birthday.

[00:13:16] **Kendra** Her mother has never allowed any sort of communication, so Zoey starts writing her biological father in secret. And he tells her that he is innocent. And throughout this book, as Zoey comes to understand that her assumption that people who are in prison are always the bad guys, that the system always gets it right—or even that the system works, honestly—all of that goes up into the air for her. Like, it's like her childlike belief is then, you know, disrupted by the realities of the situation. And so she begins learning about the Innocence Project in the US. And it's, you know, this story is very complex and really gives adults a way to have these conversations with kids.

[00:14:08] **Kendra** This is a very age-appropriate book and starts introducing these ideas to kids in this age group. And I was very impressed with how complicated the book became, but it was very effective at the same time. It didn't get lost or muddled or confused. And there's a lot of themes of forgiveness and reconciliation and what that looks like. And I think that this is an incredibly important step for kids to understand, is this first kind of understanding that the system is broken, and there are innocent people in in jail. And it kind of gives you the starting steps for more in-depth, you know, look at incarceration. But, you know, this is for kids. But I thought it was really well done. Jaclyn, have you heard of any other books for kids that start tackling this topic at such an early age, I guess?

[00:15:03] **Jaclyn** Oh, that's probably a gap in my reading. I admittedly don't read a lot of books set at that age. And I honestly can't think of any. But I'd love to hear from our listeners if anyone has any recommendations for us, particularly outside of the US too.

[00:15:19] **Kendra** Yes, I would love to read more books for kids and to have those conversations. I think it can be such a difficult topic to talk about with kids. And, you know. But it's still a very important thing that they need to understand. And so I'd never read a book that introduced the topic to kids in such a way. I always felt like most of them were about incarceration in the past, maybe. Or it was not a contemporary book. And it certainly didn't really deal with things like the Innocence Project, which are a very real organization. There is resources in the back of the book as well, if you're interested in talking to your

child more about it. And I just felt it was really well handled. But that is FROM THE DESK OF ZOEY WASHINGTON by Janae Marks. It's a very hopeful book, which I think is really good for for kids as well. And Jaclyn, you have our first discussion pick.

[00:16:14] **Jaclyn** Yeah. So I'm very excited. I really, really enjoyed reading this book. It is PRISON BY ANY OTHER NAME: THE HARMFUL CONSEQUENCES OF POPULAR REFORMS. And it's by Maya Schenwar and Victoria Law. And it helpfully has a great introduction by Michelle Alexander, who I think many of you might be familiar with from her work THE NEW JIM CROW. And this one is a really interesting work because it's looking at prison reforms and things that people would think of as alternatives to incarceration. And it's really looking at how so many of them actually are still forms of carceral control. And I think it's really interesting because one of the things that is really central to what the book is doing and unpacking is sort of broadening the net of what people might think of when they think of incarceration and players involved in carceral control. So it's looking at a whole range of things, including, you know, technological fixes that end up becoming the sort of alternates to, you know, formal prison.

[00:17:18] **Jaclyn** So when looking at the different people that are involved in incarceration in this broader definition that they use in this book, I think one of the things that I found really interesting was this look at, you know, scientists creating the technologies that go into, you know, forming these new digital prisons, as they phrase it in the book. Looking at teachers and pastors and people running homeless and domestic violence shelters. . . . And I really think it really expanded how I think of incarceration and sort of really holds up a critical lens to a lot of these different reform options that people look at when they think of ways that we can get rid of or reduce an emphasis in the justice system on incarceration. So I just found this such a fascinating book.

[00:18:08] **Jaclyn** And I am going to link in the show notes to an interview that I watched with the authors and their publisher on YouTube. So check the show notes for that. But it's a really great conversation about, I guess, what they were trying to do with this book and how this is really, as a text, it's really just part of a conversation. It's not a quick fix. It's not a way to end things and a prescriptive guide for doing things better. It's really just . . . it's a toolkit. And it's really trying to break down what the problems are that incarceration is trying to deal with and how these can be more helpfully and more progressively dealt with in communities. So I can't recommend it enough. And I'm so excited to talk about it with you, Kendra, next episode. So that one again is PRISON BY ANY OTHER NAME: THE HARMFUL CONSEQUENCES OF POPULAR REFORMS by Maya Schenwar and Victoria Law. That's out from The New Press. And Kendra, you have our second book that we'll be discussing.

[00:19:06] **Kendra** Yes, so my discussion pick is INCARCERATION NATIONS: A JOURNEY TO JUSTICE IN PRISONS AROUND THE WORLD by Baz Dreisinger. This is a book where the founder of the program the Prison-to-College Pipeline—which works with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated folks to get them into a college program once they are released from prison—and she decided to take a sabbatical and to travel around the world and talk to people who are doing various forms of programs and incarceration systems around the world and to see what their, you know, prison reform looks like. What is going on to advocate for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people in different countries around the world?

[00:19:56] **Kendra** And this is very much a type of memoir / travel writing kind of book in that is very much from the author's perspective. And so I was trying to find books on prison

systems around the world, but I couldn't find any on audio that were written by non-Americans. So just as a heads up, this is an American person, you know, wandering around the world. And we'll talk a little bit about, you know, the set up and the context of her writing in our discussion episode. But one of the things that I really appreciated about the book is that she looks at systems in different countries that are being run by people in those countries. And she's kind of standing off to the side as an observer. Sometimes she will train people in different countries, but it's very much with the intent that they take the tools that she gives them. And then she steps away, and they run with it so that it's not just some American person telling people what to do. She was trying to give them tools and then move on to a new place. And so I really appreciated that understanding that she has of like her role is not to take over, which is something that I was a little bit concerned about heading into the book. But I really appreciate her perspective on that.

[00:21:18] **Kendra** So she takes you to a different prison system in a different country with each chapter. I think one chapter covers two countries. But for the most part, she's kind of taking you on this journey. And it's really interesting the way that she goes on this journey and the different aspects of her . . . what she believes coming into contact with other systems. And she kind of works through that. So it is a very personal journey for her, which I didn't really expect to be as much personal. I thought it would be a little more objective and research, but it really is more like a memoir. Is that what you found about the book, Jaclyn, when you picked it up?

[00:21:58] **Jaclyn** Yeah, I definitely felt it was her coming in as an observer, which I think had its strengths and weaknesses. I don't think that's sort of a perfect way, or one way, to write on this theme. But, yeah, it definitely has that sort of . . . that particular lens coming into it. So it's a great one to read amidst other reading. But I would hesitate to recommend this as, like, the only book you read on incarceration.

[00:22:22] **Kendra** Right. I don't think there is a singular book about incarceration that you could just read by itself. I think. . . .

[00:22:28] **Jaclyn** No.

[00:22:30] **Kendra** You know, as we say for all of our themes, this is just a sampling. And hopefully, it will encourage folks to go and read a wider range of titles, including fiction and nonfiction and systems of incarceration around the world. But I think these books do pair well together because they make you think about incarceration in a different way. This book, I think, it was very much the idea that America has colonized countries in certain ways and that includes exporting our idea of prison to other countries. And that really . . . like, I was like, Oh! Yes. That, I mean, that makes sense that with, you know, colonization that that would happen. But then she actually reports on what that looks like in different countries. And so that was a unique perspective that I appreciated. So that is INCARCERATION NATIONS: A JOURNEY TO JUSTICE IN PRISONS AROUND THE WORLD by Baz Dreisinger. And that is out from Other Press. And we'll be talking about that next time.

[00:23:34] **Kendra** So today we wanted to give you some extra resources because, like we said, it became very apparent very quickly that there's no singular selection of books that would really give people the information that we want to communicate. So we have collected further reading and further resources like documentaries, websites, et cetera, for you all to check out to hopefully give you a more well-rounded perspective on incarceration in different places around the world.

[00:24:04] **Jaclyn** Yeah, I feel like our show notes are always quite detailed and layered, but this time it's definitely a you-need-to-read-the-fine-print because there is a lot in there, a lot of links and hashtags and social accounts to go follow because there really is just such a huge amount out there that you can read on this topic. And this is very much just a drop in the ocean of what is out there. And it's obviously, again, very regional specific given our backgrounds. So we would love to hear from listeners if there is anything you want to share with us that you'd also recommend.

[00:24:33] **Jaclyn** So two of the books that I read this year—and they're fiction—that I really recommend checking out if you're looking for Australian works on this topic. . . . THE NATURAL WAY OF THINGS by Charlotte Wood, which is a fiction book, but it has a sort of a nonfiction inspiration behind it. And I know Charlotte Wood has talked about this a lot in interviews. So there's a lot out there to look at. But one more recent one that I would highly recommend is AFTER STORY by Larissa Behrendt. And the way that incarceration comes into this story is very . . . it's not sort of the central premise, but it sort of is in a way. And I'm being very vague because I don't want to spoil it. But I think the way that it looks at narrative and agency while looking at incarceration in a very literal sense in the plot is just so clever and nuanced. And it's just a brilliant book. I've seen so many people rave about it. It's getting amazing reviews here in Australia, so I fully expect it to grace a lot of awards lists probably next year, things like the Stella, the Miles Franklin. So that's definitely one to have on your radar as well.

[00:25:43] **Kendra** And we've already discussed AGAINST THE LOVELESS WORLD by Susan Abulhawa, but I would highly recommend that you go check out our discussion episode and read this book because I think it's a really important look at colonization and incarceration and how those are very much often tied together. And this is a fiction book. And so I think having a balance of fiction and nonfiction is a way to keep your mind thinking about incarceration and what that might look like. Obviously, THE NEW JIM CROW by Michelle Alexander is a key work in the United States on incarceration. It is ten years . . . at least ten years old at this point. But there is an audiobook. And there is, like, the updated edition of the print book has updated information as well. I think there's like an anniversary edition or something.

[00:26:32] **Kendra** Also something that I don't see a lot of people talking about with incarceration in general readership is the connection of disabled, the connection of disability and incarceration. So, for example, there is a connection when deaf folks are incarcerated. And so there's a book called DEAF PEOPLE IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM. And that is a group of writers talking about what it is like to be a deaf person and being incarcerated and the lack of interpreters and the fact that you might be arrested for resisting arrest just because you're trying to sign, you know, that you are deaf. And they take that, as you know, you're reaching for a weapon or something. And just all of the complications of that. There's also discussion of people being forcibly incarcerated in psychiatric facilities and different things, which is discussed in one of our discussion picks. So I won't go into that. But I've included several books on the topic of disability incarceration in the list in the show notes for you all to check out.

[00:27:45] **Jaclyn** One of the other resources I just want to put on everyone's radar—and it's certainly on mine because it is airing later this week at the time we're recording this—and it's a documentary that is going to be airing on NITV here in Australia called "Incarceration Nation." And I know I've seen particularly a lot of First Nations activists and thought leaders that I follow on Instagram and Twitter have been sort of sharing that this is

coming up. So it's one that I'm really anticipating watching. So we'll pop links in the show notes where you can check that one out too.

[00:28:16] **Kendra** And there's a documentary called "13th" on Netflix that you all can also go check out. I know it's available here in the US. Is it . . . can you get access to that in Australia?

[00:28:27] **Jaclyn** Yeah, that one's available. Yeah.

[00:28:29] **Kendra** Okay. So that is available in multiple countries. And you all can check that out.

[00:28:33] **Jaclyn** One thing that I wanted to flag. And I know every August, there's a Bookstagrammer, (@allisonreadsdc), who does this wonderful book drive as part of her birthday celebrations, trying to get books to incarcerated readers. And I really wanted to try and find some international resources for people that want to help do that, to help get books in the hands of incarcerated readers. And I came across one here in Australia called the National Prison Book Program, which is run by the Australian Prison Foundation. So I'll pop a link to that below. But I'd particularly love with people in various countries around the world can share some resources that we can pop on the Reading Women website if people do want to help in that way.

[00:29:13] **Kendra** Well, those are just a sampling of some of the resources that will be in our show notes. Again, please go check those out. All right. So that's it from us for now. We will be back, of course, with our next episode in a couple weeks. But until then, Jacklyn, where can folks find you around the internet?

[00:29:30] **Jaclyn** So I am on Instagram and Twitter and BookTube (@sixminutesforme). And Kendra, where can people find you?

[00:29:37] **Kendra** People can find me (@kdwinchester) on social media. So you all can find me with that username across the internet. All right. Well, that's our show. Many thanks to our patrons, whose support makes this podcast possible. This episode was produced and edited by me, Kendra Winchester. Our music is by Miki Saito with Isaac Greene.

[00:30:04] **Jaclyn** And join us next time when we dive into our discussion picks, INCARCERATED NATIONS and PRISON BY ANY OTHER NAME. And in the meantime, you can find Reading Women on Instagram and Twitter (@thereadingwomen). And thank you for listening.