

Ep. 118 | Incarceration Nations & Prison By Any Other Name

[00:00:11] **Kendra** Hello, I'm Kendra Winchester, here at Jaclyn Masters. And this is Reading Women, a podcast inviting you to reclaim the bookshelf and read the world. Today, we're talking about our discussion picks, INCARCERATION NATIONS and PRISON BY ANY OTHER NAME.

[00:00:26] **Jaclyn** And you can find a complete transcript of this episode over on our website, readingwomenpodcast.com. And don't forget to subscribe so you don't miss a single episode.

[00:00:37] **Kendra** So we are back for our discussion episode on our theme. But before we jump back in, I also wanted to remind you that we have a Patreon. Our Patreon helps us keep this podcast accessible. That's what pays for all of our transcripts and any resources that we may need, different things like that. Podcasting can be very expensive. So we greatly appreciate you all supporting us to make this podcast possible. I want to highlight some of the exclusives that Patreon members receive. In addition to our quarterly book club and our exclusive podcast episodes with various guests, we also have a Patreon newsletter. And that is written by our wonderful RuthAnn, who keeps the podcast running and is doing a lot of organization in the background. And so while you, the listener, may never see this, she gives us our biweekly update emails. She helps me with organization and figuring out different tasks. So she really is a wonderful team member. So definitely would recommend the newsletter where she talks about different books that she's reading and includes photos of her dog, Ted, who is the most adorable, grumpy old man. Who doesn't love a Westie, you know? All right. So that will be linked in our show notes. And now it's time to talk about our theme.

[00:02:07] **Jaclyn** Yeah. So just a reminder, this month we're reading books about Incarceration. And you can jump back in to our last episode to catch a bit of an introduction where we sort of frame what we're going to be talking about and what the discussion is sort of going to be referencing. And we also mention a whole range of resources in that episode too. And we will re-link all of those again in the show notes for this episode. But we have lists of further reading and additional resources, lots of things that you can refer to for additional reading or to have a fiction or nonfiction lens to your reading on this topic. And it's—a reminder, again—it is very much just intended to be sort of a window into this topic. It isn't exhaustive or the sort of . . . the full range of things you can read on this topic. And we would encourage you again to reach out if you have resources or books from your location that you'd like to share with us and with other listeners. We can share them on our website.

[00:03:06] **Kendra** And like every month, all the books that we will be mentioning today and mentioned in our previous episode will be available on our storefront on bookshop.org. All the books that are available in the US will be linked there. And then also, if you're an international listener, you can go to websites like Book Depository and go find them. And that has free international shipping. There's also another website called Wordery you could go to as well, and that will have books that will ship internationally. And I also frequent them and buy books from Australia somewhat frequently. So would recommend.

[00:03:42] **Jaclyn** And Scribd is a great one if you're . . . particularly if you're looking for audio and e-book resources of titles that you can't find published in print in your country. I find Scribd really helpful from here anyway.

[00:03:54] **Kendra** It's also a very affordable resource as well.

[00:03:57] **Jaclyn** Yeah, very much so.

[00:04:00] **Kendra** All right. Well, now it's time to jump into our discussion picks. And I believe I have the first one today.

[00:04:07] **Jaclyn** Yes, you do.

[00:04:09] **Kendra** All right. So I will just keep talking. So our first discussion topic is INCARCERATION NATIONS: A JOURNEY TO JUSTICE IN PRISONS AROUND THE WORLD by Baz Dreisinger. And we're going to talk a little bit about the context of this book and some different things about it, as well as the content. And so this book is a book I found via Jenn Northington, who works for Book Riot. We work. . . . I also work for Book Riot. And so I was talking to her about it. And I remembered she mentioned it on Get Booked. And this book is one of the only books I found that covers a wide range of prison systems and different types of incarceration around the world. And I was really looking for a book that was written by people from these various countries, but I really didn't find anything like that. We always love a good anthology. And so I eventually found this book.

[00:05:07] **Kendra** And I wanted to give that context of this journey because this book is not a researched, kind of, nonfiction book. This is very much more of a memoir / travel writing. And so just as a heads up going into it, I feel like the copy on the jacket and online kind of frames it as a general nonfiction. But it is definitely more of a memoir from the author's perspective as someone who works and teaches different aspects of criminal justice and topics around that at university. But she also has a program called the Prison to College Pipeline, which works with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people to get them into college and help them integrate into life outside of prison. And so she took a sabbatical and traveled for two years around the world and talked to folks about different programs that they were running in their countries and those prison systems and kind of gives you like a little fly-on-the wall experience of what those programs are like.

[00:06:14] **Jaclyn** I think one of the other things that's sort of helpful to note is this book is a couple of years old. So there's a few maybe statistics and other reference points that may have changed since it was first published.

[00:06:27] **Kendra** Yes, it was published in 2016. And so she was traveling in 2013, '14, or '15. So it's fairly old at this point. And that . . . also, I want to note there is some outdated language. So for example, she talks about differently abled folks, and we know that "disabled people" is typically how you would say it. And there's just different language stuff to note in that it is, again, a little dated. So. But I think the fact that she is traveling around the world and just describing these different systems and the specific problems that those countries are facing, the programs that people from those countries are creating to try to help with those problems. . . . And she talks a little bit about how effective those programs have been. But much of it is just her talking to incarcerated people around the world and learning about their experiences.

[00:07:23] **Jaclyn** Yeah, I really appreciated the range of experiences as well, like so many different countries and approaches to incarceration, I think was a real strength of what she covered.

[00:07:33] **Kendra** Yes. And so she covers nine countries in eight chapters. Most of those are one country per chapter. And so she kind of focuses almost on a theme, also of the different problems that that country is facing. Or she takes a unique approach. So, for example, in Thailand, she looks at a women's prison and how the princess of Thailand was working on prison reform and what that looked like in the country. And it was just really interesting to hear about that experience and the different programs that Thailand had. So there were a lot of different chapters in this book. Jaclyn, did you have a particular chapter that stood out to you?

[00:08:14] **Jaclyn** Yeah, there are two I wanted to mention. I think most people will obviously guess by my accent, I'm from Australia. And there was a chapter, obviously, looking at Australia, which I think it's unsurprising to see a chapter on Australia in a collection looking at incarceration because the colonial experience in what is now Australia very much started with carceral origins. You know, people were sent from the United Kingdom. Australia was a point of incarceration at that point in history. Seeing how that has developed and how colonialism and, you know, the over incarceration of First Nations persons in the system, you know, has its origins as part of that history. So I think seeing how that is discussed in this broader context is always really interesting. And I think having an American talk about that, particularly as well, was a really interesting experience for me to read. I sort of kept thinking about how this author was doing it compared to, for example, Angela Davis, who has also written a lot about the incarceration experience in Australia. So I found that really interesting.

[00:09:31] **Jaclyn** But the chapter that I really wanted to talk about, Kendra, was the one on Brazil, which I knew very little about, admittedly. And I found it interesting that she talked a lot about how Brazil, at least at the point in which she was writing this book, had the fastest growing prison population in the Americas. And this chapter was really looking at, from a systemic point, this idea of super maximum and solitary confinement prisons and dedicated blocks. What I thought was really interesting as well in what she was exploring in this was how the people working in this prison almost had this sort of supervisory aspect and sort of secondary role as being investigators of gang activity. I just found that real interesting. I think it was something that hadn't perhaps come up in a lot of the other chapters anyway.

[00:10:23] **Kendra** Yeah, she goes into detail about how colonialism includes, you know, America exporting its ideas around incarceration. And so there definitely are some connections there in the isolation that has been used in Brazil. And it was just really interesting because she kind of looked at it in a new way. And not only are you learning about a different prison system, but also you're like America has far-reaching effects in its, you know, our atrocious system of incarceration here. And that's not just our problem. It's now other people's problem as well. And that's just really sobering.

[00:11:03] **Jaclyn** Yeah. And this whole idea of exporting ideas and being sort of leaders in this space. And, you know, she mentions this in the Australia chapter too. Like, Australia was the inspiration behind a lot of the legislation in South Africa during apartheid. So, yeah, I found that idea of exporting ideas really interesting to consider in that context as well. And how about you, Kendra? Did you find any of the chapters particularly stood out when you were reading?

[00:11:29] **Kendra** Yes. I previously mentioned Thailand. And that was a really interesting chapter because most topics around incarceration are about men who are incarcerated. And that chapter focused on women who are incarcerated. But the one that really struck

me was Norway. And we often view that area of the world as the idyllic place. And so Norway has a much more progressive perspective on the prison system. And so it's just a different way of looking at it. And so she's profiling this. And the title of the chapter is actually "Justice?" And what really struck me was this anecdote near the end of the chapter where the prisoners were asked, "If you could stay in this area once you were released, would you?" And they were all like, "No." You know, prison is still prison, no matter how "nice" that it is. And that was really, I think, something that is covered in our second discussion book on how sometimes we might view different types of incarceration with rose-colored glasses. But in reality, it's still part of the system. And, you know, it really asks the reader to reassess your perspective on this. And I thought that was very thought provoking and the way that she used that to kind of look at what we consider an ideal system, but it's still incarceration, if that makes sense. And I really thought about that for a long time after finishing the book.

[00:13:12] **Jaclyn** I think that the Norway chapter really interested me from the sort of focus that it had for the welfare of the incarcerated person and this emphasis on continuing the health care in the community and things like that, that I just thought it's something that is so missing from a lot of other discussions in, you know, particularly in the other countries that she was covering, at least. And I think that's interesting when you consider the anecdote that you just shared that, you know, this was still prison. It wasn't. . . . You can dress it up in different ways. It can be packaged as a different experience. But it's still a carceral experience, which I think is, you know, as you said, something that really gets hammered home in our second discussion pick.

[00:14:00] **Kendra** Yes. And so there are a lot of great things about this book, very eye-opening things that encourage folks to go read more. But I also think it's also important to discuss where this book lacks or fails in certain areas. Like we mentioned before, this is more of a memoir. But she does center herself a lot in the conversation of these different topics. And so I think the book would have done better without these doses of It came across almost as a white savior-ism ish kind of ideas . . . or that she had all these brilliant ideas, and she was trying to share them, but also learning at the same time. And it just didn't exactly strike the right note when you're talking about an international perspective on incarceration. And while she did step back and say, you know, my job is not to involve myself in this, I am a fly on the wall—which I respected her doing that—it still was like some moments, she definitely centered herself in the discussion.

[00:15:01] **Jaclyn** Yeah. And I think that's a really good point to make, particularly because this is an area so lacking in own-voices representation within the sort of body of works on this topic broadly. I think even when people that have been incarcerated or formerly incarcerated are writing and talking about these things, there's a way that they can be framed without sort of centering yourself in the discussion.

[00:15:26] **Kendra** Yes. And so I do think that's an important note. She does say at the very end of the book—which is something I think is important—and she said that this thing happened at the end of the book, and she said, "Because it's evidence that change could come person by person, consciousness by consciousness—and not from me, the foreign mzungu agent, but from within." And so she does emphasize that change comes from within the countries, not from her—who is a member of the colonial body that exported its ideas—but from the countries themselves and the people organizing within those countries. So I did appreciate that. So there are both good things and things we can be critical about in this text. But I think there's a lot of great content here. And I think as long as you read with a critical mind and understanding that this is just part of your reading and

research into the topic of incarceration, I think you'll get a lot of good out of this book. All right. So that is INCARCERATION NATIONS: A JOURNEY TO JUSTICE IN PRISONS AROUND THE WORLD by Baz Dreisinger. And that is out from the Other Press in the US. And Jaclyn, you have our second discussion pick.

[00:16:43] **Jaclyn** Yeah. So our second discussion pick this month is PRISON BY ANY OTHER NAME: THE HARMFUL CONSEQUENCES OF POPULAR REFORMS by Maya Schenwar and Victoria Law. And this one is out from The New Press in the US. And it is actually coming out in Australia at the end of September. But if you're wanting to listen to it in time to listen to our episode, you can check it out on Scribd on audio, which is how I read it. This one is a really, really interesting text. And as it sort of says in the title, it's looking at a whole range of popular reforms that are often posited as viable and more holistic alternatives to incarceration, but still, as the authors posit, end up being forms of carceral control in their own right. So it's looking at things that are on their face, look like steps in the right direction.

[00:17:35] **Jaclyn** So there's lots of discussion in this text about, you know, technological fixes that can end up in themselves becoming digital prisons of sorts and lead us to places where we don't want to go. So a lot of the, you know, very subject matter, specific way it's looking at things like electronic monitoring of people, body cameras on police, house arrest, you know, all things that have been pitched as alternatives to incarceration. And, you know, on their face, people might think, well, aren't these better than prison itself? And I think this really looks at how a lot of these things can, you know, convert home into becoming prison. Like if someone is under house arrest, and they have an electronic monitoring device on them, their home that they might live in with other members of their family, their children, becomes this digital prison of sorts. You know, they can't even walk to the end of the maybe driveway to put out their trash without setting off a sensor on their system so there's things that become very real barriers for both them and their family.

[00:18:47] **Jaclyn** And it also makes incarceration a more public element than perhaps it is when it's, you know, sort of separate geographic place. I think there was a lot of discussion and people that they were, you know, talking with in this book that had experienced, you know, people their lives were more aware that they were incarcerated or impacted by a carceral regime because it was so much more present. And I think that was something that I think they really . . . that the interviews that they shared really were able to bring that out in a really robust way. The other thing that I think was really interesting was to consider incarceration itself as a reform on this sort of historic spectrum. And that when incarceration first came in as an alternative to things like corporal and physical punishments and capital punishments, it was a reform at some point in time. So it's, in itself, it's interesting to consider it on this spectrum of reform.

[00:19:48] **Kendra** Yes. And I think this has brought up a lot of topics that I haven't seen discussed when discussing incarceration is that with all of these new tech updates and this idea that these tech updates are the reforms that we need, but the authors are discussing, yes, we need prison reform, but are these the actual prison reforms that we need? And they use this analogy of how some of these reforms, particularly the ones they talk about in the book, use the same fundamental principles. So some of these ingredients—like how our system is incredibly racist, and it really stigmatizes poor people or chronically ill disabled people, people with mental illnesses—they use those same ingredients. So while it might look differently, there's still these faults that are in this "new" system that they're building. It just . . . it's kind of like, as the title says, prison by any other name. And I thought that they made such great points that I hadn't really seen in the more general

discussion around incarceration. And so I think this book will bring that into a general reader's orbit. And they make it incredibly easy to understand by taking different chapters on the different parts of prison reforms that are happening and how a lot of those reforms are not actually very helpful.

[00:21:11] **Jaclyn** And I think one of the things that's really helpful is they really try to distill what it is that incarceration is trying to achieve. Like at a elemental level, what is it trying to change in society or change in a person's behavior? Or what is it trying to signal? And I think that's sort of integral to what they're saying is part of moving beyond prisons and incarceration generally. And it's. . . . They're really trying to look at what can be done to make that as a system go away without creating something that is just as bad or potentially worse. And I think they're. . . . Going back and looking at the actual problems rather than just providing an alternative is a huge part of the solution that they're sharing in this book. And one of the things that I just found really profound was that sometimes the best alternative is actually just to not do anything. So I found this book a really engaging discussion. And I think it, as well, brought in so much broader encompassing of this idea of incarceration than I'd perhaps considered before I read it.

[00:22:22] **Jaclyn** I think one of the things we flagged in our last episode was how much this really broadens the sort of cast of players that are part of the carceral system broadly. So it's not just looking at like prison wardens and, you know, the very literal people that would be part of a prison system. You know, it's looking also at, you know, what role schools and teachers have, pastors and different people administering programs that have all of these points where they end up having a carceral element. And I think the book, particularly, there's a chapter that looks at schools being this sort of pipeline to prisons, which I found really interesting in light of the author's role in our first discussion book. But really looking at how much, particularly in America, schools are starting to feel like prisons. And they're being run like prisons. You know, it talks a lot about the arming of teachers and security in schools—you know, post the Parkland shooting—and how a lot of these systems continue to police in a very disproportionate way, Black and brown students. And, you know, I think one of the comments that they talk about in this chapter was how the systems are almost set up to protect white students from Black and brown students. So I think in the context of all of these different systems of sharing, I found this way that schools are discussed a particularly interesting one.

[00:23:59] **Kendra** And one of the other things that I really appreciate that they covered was in chapter two, which is called "Locked Down in Treatment." They talk about people who are incarcerated and are considered mentally ill. And so even without . . . even outside of this context, if you are just mentally ill, you can be forcibly incarcerated in a psychiatric facility. So then if you are charged with some sort of crime, that adds another element. And you can also be forcibly detained in a psychiatric facility, but you lose even more rights than if you were forcibly incarcerated for mental illness in the first place. And if you are forcibly put into a psychiatric facility, you cannot leave. And then if you're charged with crimes, you have to go through the court system or go through all of that paperwork as well. So it's way more complicated. And they give a lot of anecdotes about that, how often times what this is is like trying to force treatment on a person. But that's not necessarily what they need. Or the reason that this person is struggling with mental illness is because of medical trauma from past things.

[00:25:14] **Kendra** There's an example of someone who is detained for twenty-three hours and not even allowed to go to the restroom. And as someone who was disabled, this person, you know, that was something that they had a recurring problem with. And it was

just all of these things were exacerbated. And they really laid out in a very clear way, like the snowball effect that this one event had on this person's life and how broken the system is. And I think it really is just, you know, that is just one example of how people who have court-mandated treatment, whether that's for drug addiction or they need psychiatric care or whatever, they're not actually being cared for. It's more like they just want to have them removed from society and how harmful that is for the people who are incarcerated for these reasons. And I think this is a type of incarceration a lot of people don't even realize exists. And I think that this is something that definitely made me go look at their resources to go read more on because it's such an important topic, especially in the disability community.

[00:26:25] **Jaclyn** Yeah, one of the other sort of more hidden elements. . . . If people have read a lot in the sort of existing scholarship on incarceration that exists. . . . You know, if you've read a lot of works by Angela Davis, for example, you'll be familiar with the cost and how money plays into discussions around the prison industrial complex and trying to abolish the systems. And I think one of the things that gets explored in this text that I found really unique was the way that the individual, sort of, burden has this financial burden of these ultimate measures. So how much they will have to pay to be part of particular programs or monitoring systems. And I'm not sure how much this is specific to the US example. I admittedly don't know enough about how that sort of cost distribution occurs within the Australian justice system. But I know it figured really heavily in the discussion in this book about how much the burden of that cost of these alternatives to incarceration actually falls on the shoulders of the person.

[00:27:36] **Kendra** It's like they're being fined on top of being on house arrest. So not only are they at home and not able to earn money or care for their children or pick their kids up or go in to these family life events, they're also being charged per day for the system. So it might be cheaper for the county or the state or whoever would be paying for someone to be in prison. They are . . . the cost goes to the person who is being in this new form of incarceration.

[00:28:09] **Jaclyn** Yeah, I feel like it's such an important thing that gets brought up in discussions about, you know, incarceration versus alternatives and how much the state will save doing other things. And it always presents this argument that it's . . . that sort of a false economy that's being presented in those discussions. So yeah, I really . . . I thought it was really done in a nuanced way in this book.

[00:28:31] **Kendra** And the organization of this book is really excellent. And each chapter is well researched and provides these anecdotes that really back their point in a very effective way. And so the craft of the book is also just fantastic. So I really appreciated that they were able to present their ideas in this clear, structured way that makes it easy to digest as you're moving on. And you can read a chapter and then come back. And the book really works well and is really accessible as far as the reading experience.

[00:29:04] **Jaclyn** Yeah, I think that that sort of focus within each of the chapters and breaking down to like sort of one alternative worked really well. And the sort of very anecdotal way that it drew on source material, I found a really engaging way to present it. I think it really brought home that there is such a human element to these discussions that gets left out when it's just talking about figures and budgets and, you know, institutional factors. I think, you know, remembering that this is a very human experience. . . . It's one that affects real people and has huge consequences on people's lives. I think the way that this is written really draws that out in a way that I don't perhaps see as much in other texts

on this topic. So, again, that 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 in the US.

[00:29:55] **Kendra** Well, those are our two discussion picks. Jaclyn, what are you currently reading right now?

[00:30:01] **Jaclyn** So I am currently reading a fiction work called ONCE THERE WERE WOLVES by Charlotte McConaghy, which is out in Australia via Penguin and in the US by Flatiron, I believe. And it may seem quite removed from what we're talking about today. But without going too much into spoilers, I do still feel like it has a very peripheral connection to some of the discussions that we've had today, you know, particularly looking at mental health and sort of spin-on effects of that in people's lives and how that is handled sort of within this broader justice system. But it's such a fantastic book. I feel like McConaghy really brings in so many discussions about, you know, climate and the environment and, you know, other issues around that within her fiction. So I'm just finding it an absolutely fantastic read. And what are you reading at the moment?

[00:31:00] **Kendra** Well, I picked up THE SMELL OF OTHER PEOPLE'S HOUSES by Bonnie-Sue Hitchcock. And I specifically picked up the audiobook because Erin Tripp (@erins_library on Bookstagram), she narrates part of the audiobook. And so I wanted to listen to this book. And then she also has most recently narrated, I believe, it's a collection of short stories. And that is a solo narration for her. And she is a fantastic audiobook narrator. So I will basically pick up anything that Erin narrates now. And so I am very excited to be able to listen to this. Erin has read a few things for me. And her . . . she's just . . . she's just so brilliant. It's amazing.

[00:31:47] **Jaclyn** Yeah, she's an incredible actor. I'm definitely going to have to add these to my TBR. It's really exciting.

[00:31:52] **Kendra** And they're fairly short. And the first . . . the one that I'm reading first, THE SMELL OF OTHER PEOPLE'S HOUSES, won an award with Audiophile magazine. I will link it down in the description box. But that's really cool that the first audiobook that she was a part of won an award. So that's pretty cool.

[00:32:11] **Jaclyn** Oh, go, Erin.

[00:32:13] **Kendra** Right. Right. So. All right. Well, that's our show for today. Jaclyn, where can people find you about the internet?

[00:32:22] **Jaclyn** So I am on Instagram and Twitter and BookTube (@sixminutesforme). And Kendra, where can people find you?

[00:32:29] **Kendra** Folks can find me (@kdwinchester). And that's across all platforms. And that's our show. All right. So many thanks to our patrons, whose support makes this podcast possible. This episode was produced and edited by me, Kendra Winchester, with music by Miki Saito with Isaac Greene.

[00:32:51] **Jaclyn** And join us next time when Kendra and Sumaiyya will be talking about books around the theme of Mysteries and Thrillers. And in the meantime, you can find Reading Women over on Instagram and Twitter (@thereadingwomen). And thank you for listening.

