

**The
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**In This Culture of Discipline and Punishment -
Your Panopticon is Watching You!
Represent Our Resistance
By Dr. Lenore J. Daniels, PhD
BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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Greek democracy loved freedom but lived off its prisoners. Slaves, male and female, worked the land...

-Eduardo Galeano, [Mirrors](#)

Benton Harbor, Michigan activist Rev. Edward Pinkney tells us that we are all in prison, all subject to surveillance, to arrest while innocent.

In the U.S. citizens are taught to look for examples of gulags and detention without due process in China, Russia, Iran - somewhere else. In China, Russia, Iran and somewhere else, the citizens *know*. Here in the U.S., citizens believe in the government's difference from all other *visible* forms of power displayed in countries elsewhere.

We do not live in a fascist or communist state! We live in a democracy!

How certain are you that we live in a democracy? Who informs you?

Most of us are unaware that governmental powers subject citizens to the Panopticon machinery.

Some people *know*!

In a prison compound, Michael Foucault writes, the major effect of the Panopticon is "to

induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power [and to produce] homogeneous effects of power" ([*Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*](#)).

In the U.S. inmates in prisons labeled as such *know* the "homogeneous effects of power." *We see you, but you don't see we see you. But you know.* In a prison labeled as a prison, inmates feel the power - external to the individual. This power seeks to produce *docile bodies*, submissive behavior and thought repression - something citizens in foreign states know.

Unlike many citizens in foreign states, *exterior* inmates in the U.S. lack this knowledge because these inmates, unable to recognize the Panopticon mechanism surrounding them, believe they are *free* - not guilty of a *crime*. *Innocent!* Yet, in this *free state*, the *exterior* inmates are subject to disciplinary modality of the Panopticon machinery.

"The mechanism of the Panopticon," Michel Foucault explains, represents the "disciplinary modality of power," and as such it doesn't so much "replace" other forms of power. Rather, it "infiltrates" all other forms of power. "Undermining these other forms," it serves as an "intermediary between them, linking them together; extending them and above all making it possible to bring the effects of power to the most minute and distant elements. It assures an infinitesimal distribution of the power relations." The Panopticon appears in a conversation with a friend or stranger; it appears in our daily interactions with State institutions.

Democracy, in the U.S., is the expansion of the police state, the Panopticon machinery beyond *prison* walls. In a police state, Foucault writes, "police power must bear 'over everything,'...actions, behavior, opinions - 'everything that happens.'" Foucault died before witnessing the proliferation of must-have-gadgets and before September 11, 2001, before we were able to capture police brutality on our cell phones, but the same gadget offers authorities a means of tracking the user's whereabouts in the *free state* outside a local, state, or federal prison facility. Now, *security* is the watchful eye of the camera above the bank, school, hospital, store doors or the camera in the subway car or bus. *Protection* is the informant or agent provocateur nonchalantly laughing on the corner or kneeling near you at the mosque or church. Above all, security and protection - surveillance - is democratically distributed by the State and it all seems so normal because in the modernized Panopticon State, docile bodies are still demanded, but docility is not a guarantee of safety or protection from *punishment*. We sense this even if we have not articulated this information.

Today, the Panopticon mechanism actively seeks to punish beyond a *classical* definition of criminality. We, in the era of *terrorism*, as they tell us, are living in times calling for stern punishment.

If, as Foucault suggested - through punishment, the individual is made to *take responsibility* for the *atrocities* - then what's the *atrocities*? The *atrocities*, I argue, is non-compliance and compliance, at once! The *atrocities* is defined and, at the same time, undefined. It is something and nothing, at once. It is secret and public. Knowledge of the mechanism is *evidence collected* but unspeakable. Ignorance, too, is evidence created for the prosecution. The *atrocities* is you; it is with you as you move about your day. The *atrocities* is your discontentment and your potential discontentment, at once!

Today's era of terrorism echoes other eras, echoes others realities even now while it is ever expanding.

What was more of a punishment than enslavement and genocide in which the atrocity was at once the discontentment and potential discontentment of Black and Red people?

The State's Panopticon machinery takes no responsibility for discontentment: it punishes discontentment and searches to punish preemptive uprising of discontentment. Operators of the preceding the plantation apparatus and current reservations were never asked in past to take responsibility. The machinery is expansive now. It surveys all and, as it does so, it produces more and more - discontentment to repress, to punish. The Panopticon mechanism is for all to reckon with now.

Prisons, Foucault reminds us, are successful in that they "do not miss" their targets. Prisons (like plantations of old and reservations today) *normalize* society. In turn, their presence helps create "denormalized groups," useful classes of people. Some "denormalized" are easily identifiable and some are not.

Poverty itself is criminalized and produces a useful group of poor and political activists to help populate prisons. For most citizens born without wealthy, status, or racial privilege, life in the great Pax Americana means to be born in docility, subject to prison as *exterior* inmates, moving through one cycle of prisons to another, often ending up in the inner core of state or federal facilities.

Notable in the corporate media *persecutions* of outspoken Blacks, Red, Brown activist/celebrities and in the incarceration of Mumia Abu Jamal, Leonard Peltier, Rev. Pinkney, Fort Dix 5, Newburgh 4, San Francisco 8 and many other cases of wrongful convictions is the preemptive punishment for preemptive discontentment.

The U.S. government *frames*. It is a global effort that began as domestic policy toward Black, Red, and Brown in the Americas and extended to Asians and resulted in the tragedy of Viet Nam.

As Bush II and Barrack Obama have tried to tell you, *security* - not single payer health care, education, corporate outsourcing, workers low wages or no wages, or climate control or contaminated water or food supply - *security* is *the* issue above all others. Media cameras and mouthpieces scurrying behind law enforcement domestically and soldiers in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan engage in search and destroy missions to locate *terrorists against the State*.

And the media drafts public alerts! Dangerous terrorist captured! Conspiracy terrorists nabbed by law officials! Helicopters hover over the home of suspects, handcuffed suspects, handcuffed suspects surrounded by heavily armed police. The news footage includes statements from neighbors, shocked and terrified, and a fast-talking reporter explaining how the *conspirators* have been under surveillance at this or that mosque for months. During these months, citizens were in dangerous, but now, citizens - resume your normal lives - in peace. Here and abroad, the U.S. is keeping a watch eye on *terrorists*.

Via television screens, *exterior* inmates in the *free state* are constantly informed,

warned: be careful of the terrorist *within your own skin! Monitor your neighbor - when you are not monitoring yourself.*

Innocence is irrelevant. Classical criminality is irrelevant.

Human potential is expendable! The Panopticon is everything, and the expansion of the Panopticon machinery is the free market - everything else is opposition!

The Supermax in Florence, Colorado (ADX), the United States Penitentiary, Administration Maximum, was constructed in 1994 and houses less than one-third of 1% of federal inmate population. The Supermax houses the most dangerous - terrorists. Everything here is monitored, including mail, phone calls and visits. Even educational and recreational programs are played on inmates' television (Federal Bureau of Prisons, May 4, 2006). Prisoners sit in isolation, allowed to leave their cells for only 1 or 2 hours a day. It's a hole within a hole where humans are disappeared under U.S. soil.

Here where we are now in the Colorado Penitentiary, I am housed in the same cell with my brother Eljir Duka and my other brother Shain Duka is right next door to us. We won't be here for long cause they are going to send us very shortly as we were told to the ADX or the Supermax prison in Florence, Colorado. Over there I was told we will be completely confined and all alone in a cell for maybe, 3, 5 or 10 years as we have been told.

-Dritan Duka

We have been housed in what is called the SHU (Special Housing Unit). In the SHU, we are locked down in approx a 20 X 10' cage outside, where we do some stretch out also walkout....

Here in Colorado, our visits [family visits] are through a TV monitor. Our family would have to come all the way here to see us through a TV screen. Our phone calls are limited to 10 min. a month. This has been since we got arrested. As you can see, contact with our family [in New Jersey] is next to none. We do have a radio an AM and FM walkman. The newspaper we can receive but it's pointless because they come about a week late....

-Shain Duka

In the *free state*, one day in January 2006, a Muslim family vacationed at Poconos Mountains Recreation Center in Pennsylvania. Like most families, they videotaped themselves in the hotel pillow fighting, swimming, and horseback riding. The young men stopped at the firing range. *They are enjoying themselves. It is fun!* They are bilingual - but they are among friends. On the videotape, they are heard saying *Yo, Yo!* They don't say *Oh, my God!* They don't say *Yeah!*

Allah Akbar! (God is Greatest!).

In the *free state* on another day, a *disciplined* Circuit City clerk in New Jersey receiving a videotape of a family outing for processing, *thinks* he knows something the State should know. What?

I really don't know how something like this happened to us. It still feels like a bad dream, but it's actually reality to us now. We have been convicted of a horrific crime and now labeled as terrorists even though the evidence shown to and denied by our judge showed clear innocence.

But my dear Dritan, the videotape could never have been shown as evidence of innocence to the jury. It must incriminate without being shown. The absent videotape must suggest the atrocity of discontentment.

You, your brothers, and friends didn't say God is Greatest - in English! You pricked a nerve; you dared to challenge, no matter how inadvertently, the rules of discipline here in the U.S. You dared to assume you had freedom and democracy and the First Amendment that would permitted you certain civil liberties.

Elijir, Dritan, and Shain Duka (brothers), Mohammed Shnewer and Serdar Tatar, after 14 months of FBI surveillance and harassment from well-paid agent provocateurs (Mahmoud Omar and Besnik Baka), are framed by the militarized State with conspiracy to harm soldiers at Fort Dix in New Jersey (see <http://www.freefortdixfive.com/>).

In other words, they are punished, and as Judge Robert Kugler informed the court, the lack of evidence is of no concern to him! Judge Kugler sentences three of the young men to life plus 30 years, another received a life sentence, and last received 33 years.

The atrocity to be punished sat 5 young, working class Muslim men in a roll!

The "pre-emptive strategy," writes Jeanne Theoharis in "Guantanamo at Home," would allow for the detention and prosecution of people "who may not have committed any actual acts of terrorism but whose religious beliefs and political associations ostensibly reveal an intention to do so."

Our silence will yield the long life of the efficient machinery of imprisonment - for most all!

We won't see Donald Rumsfeld, John Yoo, Condi Rice, Dick Cheney, and Bush II standing before the law. So far, the law has stepped aside and allowed them a pass.

Exterior inmates imitate their capturers. Aggression is the cultural value most emulated. Look to the training of foreign armies at the School of Americas. *Hearts and minds* are won through the teaching of indifference to the chosen - all too willing to emulate the powerful in crushing discontentment. Justice is vengeance and empathy is weakness, just as it was in the beginning with the enslavement of Africans and the practice of genocide against native Indians. The extent in which fear is used to control thought and behavior reflects the effectiveness of discipline and punishment modalities in the U.S. Punishment not only destroys its *victims* but also *the opposition* to this capitalist regime which demands this Panopticon mechanism of control and abuse of civil liberties.

We are serving as Panopticons, watching each other as if we are in control of something, as if we are protecting something of value. As if we ourselves have forgotten the value of our humanity and responsibility toward each other.

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
BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member, Lenore Jean Daniels, PhD, has been a writer, for over thirty years of commentary, resistance criticism and cultural theory, and short stories with a Marxist sensibility to the impact of cultural narrative violence and its antithesis, resistance narratives. With entrenched dedication to justice and equality, she has served as a coordinator of student and community resistance projects that encourage the Black Feminist idea of an equalitarian community and facilitator of student-teacher communities behind the walls of academia for the last twenty years. Dr. Daniels holds a PhD in Modern American Literatures, with a specialty in Cultural Theory (race, gender, class narratives) from Loyola University, Chicago. Click [here](#) to contact Dr. Daniels.

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