

**Shifting the Spotlight:
An Analysis of Modern Panoptic Power
as a Critique of Cancel Culture**

by

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Disciplinary power, a development of the shifting discourses of the 18th and 19th centuries, found its home as practiced in Foucault's Panopticon model prison, which today manifests in the phenomenon of cancel culture, a logical end game of modern social media interactions. In this essay, I will show through a historical analysis of the way disciplinary power operates and the many institutions and realms which it has pervaded today, that cancel culture as a modern tool of social justice is ineffective because it merely replicates the same power dynamics it claims to resist. The origins of cancel culture can be traced back to a new regime of power in which the knowledge of human beings and the power exercised over them are symbiotically related. Foucault uses the Panopticon, which was a model for the prison, to explain the structure of disciplinary power as by far the most insidious and effective way of controlling human beings to date. The explosion of modern technology today has made the Panopticon and disciplinary power more relevant to society than ever. Old modes of power such as racism and capitalism have discovered new and improved ways to express themselves and fulfill their goals of profit through the panoptic structure. Its influence has reached modern technology, the economy, the prison, and social interactions alike. The undeniable parallels between the way cancel culture operates and the way disciplinary power, especially in the prison system operates, reveals cancel culture to be the social replica of it. As long as we use cancel culture as a tool to fight systems of domination, we are merely perpetuating the same patterns which keep us in subordination.

In a period known as the Age of Reason during the 18th and 19th centuries, the societies of Europe and the U.S. experienced massive historical shifts such as the rise of the scientific method, the rise of industrial capitalism, and the American and French revolutions. These shifts led to changes in discourse around knowledge and changes in cultural values and norms, which

in turn changed the method by which power was exercised over the people in society. It's important to remember that these events didn't happen in a way that can be chronologized, but rather all at once. They developed parallel to one another symbiotically creating the circumstances for one another to exist. These shifts also didn't happen overnight. It took a couple decades for the new norms to fully establish themselves into society, culminating in a new era of disciplinary power, the regime we still live under today. This was a change from the old version of power, called sovereign power, which is what we think of when we imagine a sovereign king ruling over his subjects. Disciplinary power was a much more effective way to impose power over the population, because it was inexplicit and insidious. These historical circumstances also gave birth to the prison, an institution which had never existed before, because it only made sense within the context of the new power regime. As an institution that was invented to reinforce and maintain the power of the regime, we can imagine the prison as a physical embodiment of how disciplinary power works. The power relations which are conducted and reproduced throughout our society today can be analyzed using the prison as a model. In essence, the power relations which exist in the prison structure is a more condensed version of how power is structured in our society as a whole.

Before I discuss the specific historical shifts which occurred during this time, it's important to understand Foucault's way of thinking about the way history works. Most of us think of the history of the western world as a story of progress, in which humankind becomes more advanced as time passes. The idea that science provides truer insight into the world than religion, or that prisons are a more humane form of punishment than public execution, are commonly thought of as evidence that society is progressing. But Foucault would argue that the reason why today we favor science over religion isn't because of progress, but because we live

within a historical context in which these ideas are constantly validated and upheld as true.

Whereas, the old idea that God created the universe is considered outdated or archaic because the context which gave them validity doesn't exist anymore. Therefore, it's important to note, that for Foucault, our societies are not heading in a direction which brings us closer to real truth, our values and discourse just change based on changes in history. Science is not necessarily a better way to look at the world than religion, it's just valued in our society more now, because historical shifts like the scientific revolution caused our society to place immense value on observable knowledge of the world, which in turn, devalues old ideas which aren't as based on observable knowledge.

Foucault was interested in how the relevance of a field of discourse is directly connected to the historical context in which it exists. An idea may be completely meaningful and relevant during a certain time period, but as history runs its course, may have no meaning at all, or take on a different meaning. For example, in *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault writes about how during the Renaissance, people had a very different idea of what it meant for someone to be crazy than we do now. During this time, the western conception of humanity was connected to an understanding of God, madness was seen as a unique source of wisdom, which magnified the dark side of humankind and the divine wisdom of God. But during the Age of Reason, the same idea, insanity, took on a completely different meaning in society. Rationality and innovations in scientific thought were valued as the new truth, which was based on closely observing the world, and observing human behavior. Scientists and researchers began to use the scientific method, which allowed them new language and tools to study and document human behavior. This led to a new discourse around human beings and populations which were now seen as objects of knowledge and study. The result of this meticulous study was the categorization of human beings

into different groups, defining new aspects of human nature, and diagnosing humans with abnormalities. This led to the social sciences, or, new discourses on human beings, like psychology, sociology and criminology. Through these fields, scientists started to take notice of aspects of human behavior and differences between humans that we had never noticed before, because it had never mattered under the previous power regime. This is how our conception of madness, and all aspects of human nature, became reexamined under the lens of science. Science defined madness as an illness, and mad people, who would have been left alone before, suddenly were seen as a problem that had to be addressed. It's important to remember that there was no change in the condition of mad people which suddenly made them threatening. But because of the shift in discourse around madness, and the power regime that accompanied it, insanity became a problem and was seen as a threat to the norms of society, creating a need for new institutions where they could be confined. The mad people who were previously left alone during the Renaissance became demonized, institutionalized, and the objects of intense scientific scrutiny.

Along with institutions like mental hospitals, the prison was a new institution, founded during this era, born from new discourse around science to the support the new rules of knowledge and power. Prisons were not created as a response to rising crime rates, or because there was a change in criminals themselves. The presence of these new institutions had the double effect of exercising the new power, and also justifying the need for them in society. They simultaneously gave these institutionalized people a label that they didn't have before, and by virtue of the fact that people resided within them, proved to an evolving society that there must be a need for them. This was an entirely different way of dealing with people who committed crimes. In the age of sovereign power, criminals were publicly tortured, humiliated or executed

as their punishment. They were punished for their action by being made a public spectacle in order to warn others not to commit crimes. This made the most sense in an era of power of a king, who exercised his power upon the population as a singular object, as opposed to individuals. The goal of punishment out in the open was to deter the entire population from committing crimes. Power was invested in influencing the behavior of the group. But the new authority of science defined criminals as inherently abnormal people who needed to be fixed, or in Foucault's language, as delinquents. This kind of punishment occurred behind closed doors and was invested in directly controlling and altering the individual. As opposed to the old techniques of capital punishment, the technology of the prison didn't treat people as if they were being punished for a single act, but as if there was something at the core of their being which was abnormal and had to be corrected through surveillance and discipline. And again, according to the way Foucault explains historical shifts, criminals had not suddenly become more dangerous, nor had crime rates gone up. The prison didn't come into being because there was a need for it. Rather, it arose out of the change in discourse around human beings. The increase in knowledge exposed new objects for knowledge to be about. Science identified new kinds and categories of human beings, which never existed before. The way science defined criminals portrayed them as more dangerous and threatening to society than before, which justified their incarceration and the need for the prison in society. Delinquency was not a real or truthful definition of these people based on a discovery of a new kind of person, but rather a new way to define people under this power regime that was based on knowledge.

As we have seen, the discursive shifts during the Age of Reason had real repercussions for human lives and put people in a relationship with power like never before. Parallel to the shift in values was a shift in the way power was conducted. As well as coming up with new ways to

categorize human beings, through these same practices, science opened up new possibilities for controlling human populations. The practices of surveilling and collecting knowledge, data, and quantifiable information on individuals, which was a cornerstone of the scientific method, could also be used to exercise power and control over human multiplicities, meaning a large group of people. Inflicting and maintaining power over human multiplicities to fulfill your own ends has always been the main goal of people in power, and knowledge was revealing a new way to do so, that was more effective, insidious and pervasive than the old methods. In this new regime, the partnership of knowledge and power was the foundation.

Under disciplinary power, knowledge and power share a symbiotic relationship. The increased knowledge of individuals through documented information on everything they ever do through surveillance practices, as well as the reciprocal knowledge the individual has that they are always being monitored, changes their behavior based on what is considered normal behavior. What is considered “normal” behavior is different from place to place. “Normal” behavior in a prison may be based on one set of rules, and “normal” behavior at an office job or in school may be another. This dichotomy is used under disciplinary power as a tool to encourage individuals to surveil themselves. By imposing a standard of what they’re supposed to be, and what they’re not supposed to be, or, a model of what is considered normal and abnormal behavior, individuals constantly live under the judgement of the standards imposed by the gaze. This results in self-surveillance and changing their behavior to avoid being labeled as abnormal, for which they could be punished. The specific standards can change in different disciplinary settings, such as “bad” and “good” or “obedient” and “disobedient,” but the presence of dualism is always there. Self-surveillance also causes individuals to surveil one another. There may be literal surveillance cameras everywhere, or there may also be people around who

also have a personal stake in displaying normal behavior, like not wanting to lose their job. The effect of constant surveillance has less to do with the concrete knowledge which can be used against them, and more to do with how their knowledge of being watched manifests in the way they behave. Because individuals control themselves, the forces of power don't even have to overtly inflict it upon them. They just have to make sure the infrastructure of surveillance is there, and the power takes care of itself. As we shall see, this phenomenon is much more prevalent now, due to the expansive surveillance capabilities of modern technology.

Disciplinary power manifests within the individual, so we all have a personal relationship with it. It influences our behavior, identity, and how we define ourselves and other people. Self-surveillance leads to lateral surveillance, which is the practice of surveilling others. Since there is no difference between the way we see and judge ourselves and the way we see and judge the outer world, the practice of self-surveillance leads to surveilling the people around us. In this way, disciplinary power doesn't just occur from the top down, it occurs laterally, and from all angles at once. This is why even though we can feel the effects of disciplinary power all the time, it's almost impossible to identify its source. In the regime of sovereign power, the source of power was easily identifiable, because it clearly came from a king who we could point out and distinguish ourselves from. The rule of an individual person was imposed upon the entire population of people who were anonymous to the king. When power is exercised upon a group, and there is a clear source that can be identified by the people in the group, the population is able to find common ground with one another based on their experience of having power inflicted upon them by a king. This allows them to form a group identity based on this common experience, and common hatred of the ruler. This phenomenon is dangerous for a sovereign, because when people are united, there is always the potential that they can unite against the

power. When the power is distinctly separate from the people, an us versus them feeling can manifest within the people, and this feeling of “us” can empower them to rebel. But disciplinary power works very differently.

While sovereign power exercises its will upon the group, disciplinary power is centralized within the individual. Disciplinary power flips the scheme, so that the people who are being ruled over are the ones put in the spotlight, and the source of power is completely anonymous. Power is exercised on each person individually, which disunifies us through the lateral surveillance described above. We cannot separate ourselves from disciplinary power, which makes it so effective. When we ask ourselves today who controls us, it can be an abstract and blurry task because there’s not a single person or source we can easily point to. Often, the best we can come up with is an anonymous “they.” We are unable to identify the source of power, unlike people hundreds of years ago were able to identify a sovereign. This is intentionally so and works to the benefit of the people who hold power, because it makes it difficult to know what to be angry at. This is a much more effective method of maintaining control over a population, because everyone feels alone in their experience of being watched, which takes away the feeling of a group identity. Without a group identity and a clear enemy, any chance of rebellion against the power regime almost completely vanishes.

Disciplinary power can be imagined as a toxic relationship, where one person is manipulating the other and the power is discreet and insidious. This is as opposed to sovereign power, which would look more like a teacher telling their student what to do, the power being clear and explicit. In the example with the child and teacher, the child can find a clear source of power, and identify a person who they can hold responsible for the power and point to as a clear target for their anger and resentment. But in the case of manipulation, much of the power takes

place within the way the manipulated interacts with themselves and the things they believe. They may be completely unaware that they are being manipulated and are less likely to liberate themselves from the situation. They may not want to be liberated, misdirect their frustration, or be completely oblivious to what's happening to them. The power is so subtly ingrained within them, it feels normal, and they are completely alone in it.

The panopticon is a hypothetical prison that Foucault uses as a blueprint to show us how this new version of control, disciplinary power, actually works. The inventor of the panopticon prison was Jeremy Bentham, a philosopher who was invested in the reforms and societal changes which were occurring during the period of the 18th and 19th centuries. He created it as an architectural model for the prison but intended the power it imposed to be so flexible, that it could easily be applied to any institution or scenario. Many early prisons in the U.S. were modeled after the panopticon, and there are a number of prisons today which follow its structure. The purpose of the panopticon was to come up with a structure that could enforce the maximum amount of discipline and control over the inhabitants, while requiring a minimum amount of effort from the guards and wardens to enforce it. In essence, the structure of the building was designed to do the work of power for them. Foucault uses the panopticon as a visual model to better understand the structure of disciplinary power within our society. The panopticon prison can be executed in a number of technical ways, but there are two key components that must be in effect, which make it a panopticon. The first requirement is the housing situation of the prisoners, or, the objects of power. The panopticon must have an array of individual holding cells that are securely separated from one another and thoroughly sound proofed. This is for the purpose of keeping each prisoner completely isolated from any human contact, to prevent them from seeing or communicating with one another. Foucault calls this “individualization” which is

an essential operation of the panopticon. Individualization guarantees control over each person and eliminates the possibility of prisoners forming a collective identity, which is a threat to power. When people have the freedom to communicate and socialize, they have the potential to unify as a group against the power that oppresses them. But a disciplinary institution like a panoptic prison is designed to eliminate the possibility of rebellion, by ensuring that each inmate always feels completely alone.

The second requirement is, in addition to all the cells, a single viewing tower at the very top or towards the center of the building, where only the guards and wardens of the prison would be allowed. The tower is positioned in a way where anyone inside can see each individual cell and each prisoner within them at the same time. But the key is, none of the prisoners can see inside the tower, so they are unaware if, or when they are being watched. Not knowing when they're being watched, and afraid of being punished, the prisoners are forced to assume they are always being watched. And the knowledge that everything they do is being carefully documented, monitored and recorded begins to affect the way they behave. They start to act differently and monitor their own actions to make sure they're not doing anything wrong. Altering their personalities to avoid punishment becomes integrated into their nature, and eventually they don't even think about it. Experiencing this level of surveillance during all hours for a long period of time, they develop an individual relationship to the power that controls them.

Again, in this scheme, power by excessive force isn't necessary because prisoners internalize and inflict it upon themselves. Within the panopticon, the spotlight is switched to the object of power, not the source of power. We can think of it as the opposite of a dungeon, where prisoners were locked away and out of sight, but free to communicate with one another. In the panopticon, the prisoners are always seen, so they have no privacy and are in complete isolation.

They're alone in the sense that they're separated from other people, but they're never really alone. There is always the presence of power.

The structure of the panopticon shows us that the prison was created as a way to conduct and sustain power upon individuals. It is interesting, then, that today, many of us assume the prison to have all these other functions that are associated with justice. Many of us grow up thinking of the prison as a place where people serve their time and learn their lesson from it, or that the time they spend there evens the score. We might think that people in prison are there to reflect upon their actions and may be a different person when they are released. Whether we believe that prisons reform people or not, it's a commonly held view that prisons are needed in society, it's purpose being to keep the bad and dangerous people separate from the rest of us to maintain order. The feelings and ideas we have about the prison are not an accurate representation of what the prison is, but they are normal, and evidence that we are influenced by its power. In her book, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Angela Y. Davis points out that the media heavily influences our perception of the prison and reinforces its false reputation on us from a young age. Davis asks us,

How often do we encounter the phrase "crime and punishment"? To what extent has the perpetual repetition of the phrase "crime and punishment" in literature, as titles of television shows, both fictional and documentary, and in everyday conversation make it extremely difficult to think about punishment beyond this connection? How have these portrayals located the prison in a causal relation to crime as a natural, necessary, and permanent effect, thus inhibiting serious debates about the viability of the prison today?

Images of the prison are everywhere in our culture. This, and the way the power of the prison works to influence the way we think about criminals to self-regulate its fictional reputation, shuts down any debates about it and solidifies it into our culture. Later on I will explore the real role of the prison in our society and its goal as a panoptical institution, but first, we must understand the history behind the founding of the prison system. This will begin our understanding of why we feel the way we do about the prison, and where its reputation as purely a system of crime and punishment, and finally, justice, comes from.

Key historical events during the 18th and 19th centuries, the Age of Reason, set the stage for the prison to become the new center of the penal system in western society. The industrial revolution in France caused a massive production boom, the American and French Revolutions in which the formation of the bourgeois class sparked individual liberty as a core value of western society, and of course, the practice of disciplinary power within institutions. These developments are crucial in explaining why prisons were so widely accepted and quickly embraced as a new institution, a feeling we still have today. The prison was not theorized into being. It was a direct product of the social values and norms of the moment. Its historical context gave it a self-evident quality which made it an appealing innovation.

The French and American Revolutions, which occurred around the same time, catalyzed major shifts in these societies. These revolutions were both inspired by the need for independence from the forces of sovereign power that had controlled them in the past. In the U.S., the colonies wanted independence from England, and in France, the people were seeking liberation from an unjust monarchy. Both revolutions based their demands on an image for a new society, which put emphasis on individual liberty. This was a core value of the founding of the U.S. Both of these revolutions rejected the old power and embraced the idea that every

individual has inalienable rights and liberties. Within a new system of power with a new set of values, there came new ways to punish people for committing crimes. In a society that believes in individual liberty, the most rational way to punish people would be to take away that liberty. Because liberty is a right, this may seem contradictory, but the emphasis on individualism assumes the fact that every individual has free will and complete liberty over their actions, so to commit a crime comes from a place of liberty, justifying the right of the government to take it away. Also, if liberty is something every person possesses, then to take it away seems like the most fair and egalitarian punishment, because everyone is punished equally.

Post revolution, industrial capitalism was on the rise and becoming the new norm in these societies. The practice of workers giving their time in exchange for money was quickly taken for granted and accepted by everyone. By the same logic, the prisoner paying their debt to society through time, seemed like a fair and appropriate punishment, because this is how exchanges are measured in a capitalist society. Foucault writes, “There is an economico-moral self-evidence of a penalty that metes out punishment in days, months, and years and draws up quantitative equivalences between offences and durations.” (Foucault 232) Penal labor, which prisoners were subject to in prison, was also deemed a suitable practice for criminals in a production-based society. Davis point out that “Marxist theorists of punishment have noted that precisely the historical period during which the commodity form arose is the era during which penitentiary sentences emerged as the primary form of punishment.” (44) The logic was that making criminals work in a disciplined manner would reintegrate them into the machine of production and make them normal again. So the idea of “rehabilitation” was based on the assumption that if “bad people” were forced to work in prison, they would become disciplined enough into being an efficient cog in the machine of production, which by this society’s standards, would make them

“normal” again. So the idea of rehabilitation at the beginning of the prison was totally rooted in inflicting power upon people and forcing change upon them. This theory of “rehabilitation” doesn’t actually work, and as I will discuss more later, it actually functions to send ex-convicts back to prison. But regardless, the foundational principles of the prison paralleled the principles of the new values of the Age of Reason, which was enough to establish it as the new norm.

A growth in production in the age of industrial capitalism caused a massive population boom, and institutions such as the army, hospitals, schools, and factories suddenly became overcrowded with human bodies. There was a need for organization within these institutions, especially factories, whose owners were eager to find new methods which would enable them to utilize these bodies in the most efficient way possible to optimize profits. The problem, from the standpoint of these factory owners and hospital warders, was how to keep this large population of people under control to make them as productive as possible and fulfill their ends as an institution. The answer was the disciplines, which Foucault identifies as a new set of techniques of power which solved problems the old “economy of power” (Foucault 208) could not solve.

The goal was to make people as docile as possible by eliminating all the inconvenient threats to power that occur when a large group of people are subjected to explicit power. Foucault calls these populations of workers, students, and prisoners “human multiplicities,” which, from the perspective of the heads of institutions who hold power, are highly unfavorable. He writes, “Generally speaking, it might be said that the disciplines are techniques for assuring the ordering of human multiplicities. It is true that there is nothing exceptional or even characteristic in this: every system of power is presented with the same problem.” (Foucault 207) These disciplinary techniques (surveillance, individualization, isolation) are the same techniques of power used in the panopticon. The flexibility of the disciplines allowed it to be applied to any

scenario. Under capitalism, humans were disciplined to act as machinery. It was a seamless way to maintain power over a large number of people and use them to fulfill your personal goals, by imposing norms upon them and make sure they know they're being surveilled consistently, so they don't deviate from those norms.

By the end of the 19th century, nearly every institution in France had some sort of panoptic structure. At the same moment in history, the prison came into being, and because it had the same familiar structure as other institutions, it enjoyed immediate credibility. This, and all the historical developments which occurred at this time made it seem like a natural progression of history, so its existence went widely unquestioned and still is. It's important to remember that the prison was not created because of any need or demand for it. It simply made sense, so it didn't face much backlash or debate. It also seemed like a more humane and rational system in comparison to the old way capital punishment was carried out, which involved public humiliation, torture, and execution. The institution symbolized progress, a descent from the old, barbaric ways of the old power they had rebelled against. Punishment was quantifiable, institutional, strategically organized, and aligned with the authority of science and reason. The prison was embraced because it made sense in the context of the new values of the Age of Reason and allowed us as a society to distinguish ourselves from the old powers of the past.

To this day, the prison's existence still goes widely unquestioned because it feels absolutely essential to the functioning of society. It is so integral to the way we think about reality and justice, that most of us are unable to even imagine a world without prisons or believe that such a world is possible. It has become absorbed into our collective psyche and culture, because from the beginning, it aligned perfectly with peoples' idea of reality. Davis challenges "whether a system that was intimately related to a particular set of historical circumstances that

prevailed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can lay absolute claim on the twenty-first century.” (Davis 100)

Our culture has conditioned us to think that the main purpose of the prison is to keep society safe and to benefit us, but as we have examined so far, institutions that take a panoptic structure are invested in wielding power over the bodies inside for their own particular ends. Whether it occurs in a hospital, a school or a prison, the purpose of panopticism is and has always been power. The prison was designed specifically from the panoptical model, and Foucault thought that the two were meant for each other. Although Bentham’s structure was eventually used by every institution in society, panopticism found its ideal embodiment in the prison. Foucault writes,

The theme of the Panopticon – at once surveillance and observation, security and knowledge, individualization and totalization, isolation and transparency – found in the prison its privileged locus of realization. Although the panoptic procedures, as concrete forms of the exercise of power, have become completely widespread, at least in their less concentrated forms, it was really only in the penitentiary institutions that Bentham’s utopia could be fully expressed in a material form. In the 1830’s, the Panopticon became the architectural programme of most prison projects. (249)

As the center of the justice system, the prison masquerades as an institution whose purpose is to uphold justice, but really, as a panoptical institution, its purpose is to replicate power. It is a place where the power of the state can have free reign over the people inside, and they use this power to whatever ends they choose. An essential part of the way it upholds its false

reputation, and in turn, maintains its power, is through characterizing prisoners as delinquents. Not only does delinquency indefinitely extend the power the system has over prisoners, but it also has an effect on the way ordinary people think about criminals. Labeling criminals as delinquents is a dehumanizing process which sensationalizes the abnormality of people who commit crimes, which justifies taking away all their rights within prison, and the legal discrimination they face even after they have finished their time. Ex-prisoners are cycled back into the system at astonishingly high rates because of this. A prison perpetuates the problem it's supposed to solve, which justifies the "need" for itself in the first place. Delinquency also influences the way we think about people who go to prison, which, in our society, is with scorn and resentment. The stigma of prisoners is crucial for the prison to maintain its power, because in the eyes of the public, it makes them seem very different from us. Under a power regime which punishes abnormality, an easy way to feel "normal," and safe, is to create a distinction between ourselves and people who, according to the power regime, aren't "normal." This is the role prisoners have in the way we think about ourselves. We separate ourselves from them because living in a panoptic society, where this power is within our psyche and culture, we are afraid of the abnormal within ourselves. It's in the interest of the maintenance of power that we don't identify with them, because if we did, we might question their treatment, and it would naturally follow to question the real purpose of the prison. History and extensive scholarly research show that the prison is an institution that is invested in wielding absolute power over human bodies for capitalist profit. Our definition of justice, as a culture, is based on an institution that has nothing to do with justice. Like all panoptical institutions, it is invested in power.

The prison, as representing the arbiter of justice in our society, is supposed to fairly administer the punishments that criminals deserve based on their crime. This is how we define

the term “justice.” Since punishments are determined through time spent in prison, it would seem like the most rational way to decide how long someone should be incarcerated would be as a product of the severity of their crime. In order to determine what a criminal deserves, or, how much time would be just, we must carefully think about what they did, how they did it, and why. But penitentiary technology itself doesn’t work this way. It doesn’t care what the people in prison did to get in there. The focus is upon treating prisoners as objects to be closely surveilled, analyzed, and diagnosed. Remember, the prison was invented and established during the Age of Reason, in which new fields of social sciences were being established, including criminology. The prison was used as a place to study the psychology of criminals. The lens by which scientists viewed criminals, therefore, was with the grand assumption that there was some special quality which all criminals possessed, which could explain why they committed crimes. They were interested in their affinity to the crime and would conduct biographical investigations of their entire lives to trace back to the root of what caused them to become a criminal. The structure of the prison was designed to make these investigations possible, which were based on false assumptions about human nature. From the beginning, scientists and criminologists defined the entire character of these people based on an act they committed and assumed there was some aspect of their personality that made them a criminal even before they committed the act. Today, the same prison technology is in place and the way criminals are treated is based on the same assumptions. What these scientists didn’t consider is that maybe the presence of criminals says more about the institution of the prison than about human nature.

From the beginning, our justice system was based on a false premise about the nature of criminals. So of course, the way we chose to deal with them was not based on a fair assessment of what they deserved, and not based on real justice. As Foucault describes it,

From the hands of justice, (the penitentiary) certainly receives a convicted person; but what it must apply itself to is not, of course, the offence, nor even exactly the offender, but rather a different object, one defined by variables which at the outset at least were not taken into account in the sentence, for they were relevant only for a corrective technology. The other character, whom the penitentiary apparatus substitutes for the convicted offender, is the delinquent. (Foucault 251)

In other words, a person is convicted of a crime, but then once they are inside the prison, the way the technology works isn't directed towards punishing the action of the crime or to the criminal who committed the act. It is all too common for some people go to prison while others don't, for the same crime, and for two people who have committed the exact same crime, to have two completely different sentences. This is because, the prison system is about power, not justice, and specifically targets people who have been labeled by the power regime as "abnormal." The technology was structured to apply itself to the character of the delinquent, who is the kind of abnormal subject that is relevant to this kind of technology. Delinquency was the attribute all criminals had in common and scientists in the 1800s thought of it as a sub species of human beings. The problem with this is that delinquency doesn't actually exist as a real part of human nature. Even though it was a false assumption about criminals made by early criminologists, the prison still exists today, and its technology is still structured based on outdated ideas.

Delinquents are not born, but instead the trait is imposed upon people by the penitentiary, society, and the entire legal system. The label functions as a crucial part of the knowledge/power regime we live under. It is used as a piece of knowledge about incarcerated individuals which

supports the power the system has over them. Delinquency also regulates the power of the entire society by creating a population of people who we can scapegoat. We blame all the problems of society on people who commit crimes, which misdirects out anger towards our own people.

Societies problems are blamed on individuals rather than the system.

Once they enter the penitentiary, people are immediately labeled and treated as if they are a delinquent. Just by virtue of ending up in prison, they are diagnosed and defined as “abnormal,” by the standards of what we deem “normal” under this power regime. This label justifies taking away all of the freedom and liberty of inmates and subjecting them to boundless tyrannical power within the prison walls. Even after they leave prison, their lives are forever changed by the public knowledge that they are a felon. The felony label imposed by the institution becomes permanently attached to their name, character and reputation for the rest of their life. Employers, public officials, and people they meet make immediate assumptions and judgments about them based on this knowledge. Felons are legally discriminated against in cases of employment, housing, education, public benefits, and jury service. In some states, felons are even denied the right to vote, or required to go through long tedious processes in order to regain this right, which is intentionally made difficult. Even after they leave the prison, their rights are not returned, and they often become social outcasts. The label haunts a person wherever they go and ensures that whatever they do in life will be affected by the knowledge that they are a felon. “Unable to drive, get a job, find housing, or even qualify for public benefits, many ex-offenders lose their children, their dignity, and eventually their freedom—landing back in jail after failing to play by the rules that seem hopelessly stacked against them.” (Alexander 143) Because of the power at play against them due to the knowledge of their label, it’s all too common for prisoners to end up back in prison. The social position the prison imposes upon ex-criminals ensures that

their punishment never ends, and they continue to carry the stigma of a delinquent even after they've done their time. The institution inflicted label makes it so their debt to society is never paid. Foucault writes about how the prison creates the problems it claims to solve, and once a delinquent, people are funneled back into prison. Punishing someone forever for a mistake they made once is not justice.

Our idea of the delinquent is specific to our values as a society, which are embedded in our history. In western societies with long histories of colonialism and slavery, racism as a tool of power and domination has been and is still completely embedded in every aspect of our culture. In western societies today, especially the U.S., the delinquent is defined as the a black, often poor, drug criminal. The scholar, researcher and civil rights lawyer, Michelle Alexander, in her book, *The New Jim Crow*, writes about the United States prison system and network of legal systems surrounding it which work together to target people of color in general and specifically black men, to send to prison and keep them there. She argues that the mass incarceration of black men in the United States is due to a racist system which defines all black men as dangerous criminals. Every racial caste system in the history of the United States, like slavery and Jim Crow, has relied on stereotyping black people to justify their oppression, and today, the new stereotype is the criminal. Racism is a form of power which is today systematically expressed through the institution of the prison. Foucault never mentions race in his analysis of the prison, and although he recognizes that there are certain people who society labels “abnormal and dangerous,” he never speculates exactly who the delinquents of our society are. The role of the delinquent can be filled by pretty much anyone collectively shamed and considered “abnormal” in society, but today, in a racist society which values whiteness as the norm, representing

goodness, the ideal, and a capitalist society which values money, to be black or poor are considered delinquent characteristics.

A conversation about criminality is inevitably a conversation about race. Delinquency and racism work similarly, as tools to oppress and stigmatize a group of people, with the collective effect of controlling the whole population. They overlap and work together to uphold racial oppression through the prison system. The War on Drugs during the 80s is an example of how political leaders changed the way the American population thinks about criminals. By characterizing black men as delinquents, and therefore belonging in prison, they justified an unprecedented extension of the power of the police, prisons and the law, all to benefit their own political agenda. The War on Drugs was not launched as a response to a drug crisis at all, and crime in America was actually on the decline. Conservative politicians were eager to win back the White House from the Democrats and needed a strategy to appeal to poor white voters, or, the population of people who could be swayed to vote Republican through an appeal to racism. The collective image of the black man being the stereotype of a dangerous criminal in the United States became integrated into our culture when presidential candidates from Nixon to Reagan used racism to win their presidencies. They claimed that crime, especially drug crime, was the biggest problem in America, which was far from the truth. Even though various studies have shown that people of all races use drugs at roughly the same rates, it was clear that the target of the “crackdown on crime” would be black and brown people. Phrases they used during their speeches and advertisements like “welfare queen,” “dangerous criminal,” “street crime,” and “super predator” didn’t use explicitly racist language, but instead appealed to unconscious bias. The campaigns worked. The propaganda was used to justify new legislation that was marketed as keeping America safe, but only resulted in communities of color being terrorized by the police

like never before, which caused an unprecedented boom in the prison population. Alexander writes,

Viewed as a whole, the relevant research by cognitive and social psychologists to date suggest that that racial bias in the drug war was inevitable, once a public consensus was constructed by political and media elites that drug crime is black and brown. Once blackness and crime, especially drug crime, became conflated in the public consciousness, the “criminalblackman,” as termed by legal scholar Kathryn Russell, would inevitably become the primary target of law enforcement. (Alexander 107)

The political propaganda used to launch the drug war still has an enormous effect on the way we think about criminals in the United States today. As described in the quote above, our idea of a criminal is a black man, and because of the way the prison works, blackness is treated as a delinquent characteristic. Alexander mentions an important survey published by the *Journal of Alcohol and Drug Education* in which people were asked to close their eyes and imagine a drug user. 95% of participants envisioned a black person, which was a sharp contrast with reality then and now. White drug users actually make up the majority of drug users then and now, which further indicates how our idea of illegal drugs and black people are so connected. The agenda of politicians through racist media propaganda made our collective image of a delinquent to be a black man.

After the drug war, the whole system of incarceration changed drastically. New prisons were built all over the United States, the police became militarized, meaning, police forces were given more funding for more arrests made, and a series of laws were passed which made the

sentencing for drug related crimes longer than ever before in history. There was an unprecedented amount of attention and money invested into the whole penal system, which was not a reaction to the reality of drug crime or crime in America in general, and it wasn't to benefit the American public, like we thought. Criminality was racialized specifically as a tool to wield power. Alexander writes,

Most people imagine that the explosion in the U.S. prison population in the past twenty-five years reflects changes in crime rates. Few would guess that our prison population leaped from approximately 350,000 to 2.3 million in such a short period of time due to changes in laws and policies, not changes in crime rates. Yet it has been changes in our laws—particularly the dramatic increases in the length of prison sentences—that have been responsible for the growth of our prison system, not increases in crime. (Alexander 93)

The combination of the boom in carceral infrastructure and power given to the police to make arrests, and the racist propaganda, caused an unprecedented number of people to be sent to prison, especially for drug crime. Most of these people were first time offenders that were sentenced to years in prison for possessing a small amount of drugs. This collective definition of black men in our society as being criminals explains why they are systematically targeted to be sent to prison. The delinquent label isn't just inflicted in prison, or after prison; by virtue of living in this society, black people and black communities are surveilled and targeted by the police. Law enforcement are instructed and rewarded for surveilling specifically poor and working-class neighborhoods with mostly people of color. People who have never committed a crime in their life are racially profiled by the police for being black. Police surveillance

techniques also make it so that on paper, the police have a “just” reason to arrest people, because it is their individual fault that they were carrying drugs. But this surveillance is not directed toward the population equally. They specifically choose to direct their surveillance methods to predominately black and brown neighborhoods. This explains the racial disparities in prisons. The high numbers of arrests made in these neighborhoods along with the percentages of black men in prison can then be used to justify the racist surveillance agenda of the police and show that these delinquents actually exist. When really, the system is creating them. These power structures are marketed through racism as keeping people safe, but the real agenda is to maintain the system of power. This is where delinquency as a mode of power replicates itself socially and causes a person to actually become a delinquent to society. Even though the administration of the label is originally not based in reality, once the institution attaches it to you, the networks of social, political and institutional power work together to force the label upon you. In other words, the label is not a true representation of who you are, but it has real consequences on the freedom and livelihood of people who are forced to bear its weight. This is what I mean when I say delinquents are created.

Delinquency and racism are used, not just to control the people within the prison, but also the rest of us, who exist in the free world outside of it. The presence of a delinquent population first of all, effectively disunifies the population, by alienating delinquents from everyone else. On top of that, everyone is alienated from themselves through individualization and self-surveillance. Living in a society with delinquency, or a culture of labeling people as “abnormal” has a profound effect not just upon these people, but everyone who participates in it. It changes the way people think about themselves when they are always anxiously striving to prove that they are “normal” to themselves and others, out of the fear of being labeled “abnormal.” This

regime of power has an obsession with normalcy, or what it means to be normal or abnormal. This contributes to our fear of being abnormal within ourselves, and also the need to classify others as abnormal in an effort to assert our normality. This is seen in the rise of disciplinary institutions, hospitals, schools, military, mental institutions, prisons, which are invested in making people docile through a fear of behaving in a certain way in certain settings. What normal really means, in all these contexts, is docile, or, unthreatening to the power. An easy way to feel “normal” is to create a distinction between yourself and someone who is not. Prisoners fill this role for all of us. By distancing ourselves from them and participating in the culture that shames them, we feel more secure in our identity as “normal,” because we can point to an “other” who is not like us. Alexander describes felons as

the one social group in America we have permission to hate...criminals today are deemed a characterless and purposeless people, deserving of our collective scorn and contempt. When we say someone was 'treated like a criminal, what we mean to say is that he or she was treated as less than human, like a shameful creature. (Davis 141)

Stigmatizing them as a way to prove our normality to ourselves works to shift the power. Instead of the people pointing to a king as the “other,” the one they cannot relate to, we are turned against our own people. Even though we have more in common with prisoners than the people who run the prisons and the billionaires who perpetuate this power to their benefit, the power of individualization, surveillance and delinquency works to turn us against each other. Then, because we live in a culture of individualism, we can blame criminals themselves for ending up in prison and for all the problems in society, which takes attention away from the real

source of blame. We could more easily feel empathy for prisoners and have more concern for their rehabilitation and well-being if we thought of them as being human beings who also make mistakes. But this is not how we are meant to see them. We are supposed to feel like a different breed than them. The combined cultural and racial stigma that the system imposes on them is designed to alienate them from us. Even though the system targets communities of color, individualization blames people for ending up in these institutions, which takes the responsibility away from the institutions themselves. We blame homeless people for being homeless and criminals for being in prison. Disunity keeps us blaming each other, misdirecting our anger. Individualism justifies the government not helping them because they are to blame, and this creates conditions for more people to be forced into rough living circumstances, which causes them to be labeled outcasts, repeating the cycle of fear of “abnormality,” which perpetuates disunity and benefits the power. The way we think about the prison is directly connected to the way we think about criminals in our society. The prison feels essential because of the space criminals take up in the way we think about the world and our place in it. The presence of delinquency in our society works in complex ways to control the entire population and justifies the power it has over us.

So far, I have shown how the prison works as part of the knowledge/power regime to funnel and control as many bodies into it as possible, while controlling the thoughts and behaviors of everyone who lives in the carceral society, under the guise of a system of justice. The goal of every panoptic institution is to control human bodies to help reach their goals as an institution. So what is the goal of prisons? As expected in a capitalist society in which money is valued before human life, the prison today is purely a money-making enterprise. Angela Y. Davis gives up glimpses into the history of the way the prison has been used in the U.S., which

show that it has always been invested in maintaining a steady source of free labor to fulfill its goals as a panoptical institution. She also writes about the prison industrial complex today, the prison as a global industry, and the economic interest in keeping people incarcerated for longer. Prisons are a business, and to keep them running, there must be a steady and reliable source of inmates.

After the abolition of slavery in the United States, former slave states passed legislation specifically for the purpose of keeping newly freed people in a docile position. A series of laws called the Black Codes were passed, which were understood to be laws that only applied to black people. And although slavery was made illegal, there was an exception made in the Thirteenth Amendment which stated that slavery could be used as a punishment for a crime. So these lawmakers created a loophole through the institution of the prison, which made its power boundless over the bodies inside. Before slaves in the south were set free, 99% of prisoners in Alabama's penitentiaries were white, and after emancipation, the overwhelming majority of Alabama's convicts were black. This shows how the institution of the prison, as a zone where slavery is legal, has been used as a tool to aid racism as a form of power. Black people were targeted and swept into the prison system and used as free labor. Today, the prison still uses convict labor as an economic force. Convicts are responsible for building many of the commodities we take for granted in our everyday lives. There is an entire network of power which profits off of the free labor of millions of prisoners in the U.S., which Davis calls the prison industrial complex. This is the partnership between the government, the media and corporations, which all have a personal stake in the expansion of the prison system. She explains that this was a term invented by activists who assert the idea, which I have already shown to be true, that the expansion of the prison system is not due to an increase in crime, but rather the

“drive to fill these new structures with human bodies have been driven by ideologies of racism and the pursuit of profit.” (Davis 41) The prison, from its founding, has never been an institution of justice, but of power, and especially after the 1980s, has become an essential part of a global economy. Corporations we would assume have nothing to do with the prison system have huge stakes in its existence. These corporations not only rely on the free labor of prisoners to produce their products, but many rely on the population of prisoners, as bodies who require food, toiletries, and other products and services, to fulfill a huge portion of their market sales. Prisoners are considered the raw materials of entire industries, and companies need to ensure there is a steady supply of bodies into the system to ensure long-term growth. Davis quotes Steven Donziger, who writes, “For the supply of prisoners to grow, criminal justice policies must ensure a sufficient number of incarcerated Americans regardless of whether crime is rising or the incarceration is necessary.” (Davis 94) Private prisons, which are on the rise today, are prisons that are explicitly run for profit. Federal, state and county governments pay private prisons a fee per inmate, who have a direct stake in keeping the cells full and favor harsher sentencing laws. We can see there is a clear incentive for prisons to not only keep their facilities full of bodies for as long as possible, but also expand and build more prisons for more bodies to inhabit. Davis points out the horrifying reality that “black bodies are considered dispensable within the ‘free world,’ but as a major source of profit in the prison world.” (Davis 95) Knowing that prisons are at the center of a global economy, how can we have any trust that their priority is to bring justice and fairness to our world? If we think back to the conditions under which the prison was invented, and the values that the prison was based on, it only makes sense that the prison is invested in capitalist profit. More prisons means more prisoners means more power means more wealth, and we should not be surprised. Davis reminds us that “The process through which

imprisonment developed into the primary mode of state-inflicted punishment was very much related to the rise of capitalism...” (Davis 43)

It’s important to reiterate just how the structure and surveillance practices of prisons today, especially supermax prisons, bear a chillingly literal resemblance to the panopticon. After the War on Drugs, the prison boom catalyzed new kinds of maximum-security prisons to be built, which the world had never seen before. These kinds of prisons are often dubbed “supermax prisons.” They are structured to keep every prisoner in solitary confinement, meaning, in their cell for 23 hours per day, without any contact with the outside world. The practice of solitary confinement is a form of torture and has no regard for the well-being of the individual inside. A report from the National Institute for Corrections from 1999 claimed that the “overall constitutionality of these [supermax] programs remains unclear.” (Davis 51) These prisons don’t even pretend to be about rehabilitation, because they are not, and their existence again, is justified by the fact that we view prisoners as dangerous threats to society. Today, there is no need for an elaborately shaped building due to the existence and constant use of 24/7 surveillance cameras in maximum security prisons. Modern technology has eliminated the holes and gaps that were inevitably present in Bentham’s Panopticon, where the knowledge of the inmates was limited to how many hours a day a guard was present in the watch tower, and which prisoner they were surveilling at a specific moment. In Bentham’s model, it wasn’t necessary for the guards to be watching the prisoners all the time. The important part was that the prisoners internalized the feeling that they were. But modern technology guarantees that prisoners are literally always being watched. Even if there’s not a guard at their post to catch a breach of discipline on camera the moment it happens, this footage, this eye, can be rewinded, duplicated, distributed, used as evidence. Bentham’s prisoners may have gotten away with something just

because the guard happened to look the other direction, and they would have known they'd gotten away with it if they weren't punished right away. But if the prisoners nowadays get away with something in the moment, they live in fear that they might be punished for it in the future. Specific prisoners may be targeted, and their footage closely checked, so they can be punished for something they did in the past. Video and new surveillance mechanisms have made the capacity to collect knowledge practically limitless, making the maintenance of power over prisoners all the more efficient. The tools of technology have allowed us to create the ultimate Panopticon, an extreme and more terrifying version of what Bentham ever imagined. Davis writes, "Today, there are approximately sixty super-maximum security federal and state prisons located in thirty-six states and many more supermax units in virtually every state in the country." (Davis 49)

Just as modern technology has increased the capacity of knowledge on prisoners, which increases the scope of power as a result, modern technology has had the same effect on the rest of society. New knowledge collecting technology like iPhones, data collection, hidden microphones, facial recognition, and social media are completely invested in surveilling human beings for capitalist profit. The scope of power has reached an unprecedented level, which is far from being done and undone. Just like the power dynamics and techniques of surveillance, individualism, and discipline swarmed and took over every institution, and eventually every corner of society during the power shift of the Age of Reason, this kind of power is everywhere now, and new platforms and institutions are not exempt from it. Power, according to Foucault, has a swarming effect. As well as the scope of knowledge increasing which increases the control of the people at the top, power itself, in any regime, operates as a relationship which everyone in the society participates in to make sure it continues to exist. This is how social media platforms

like Facebook and Instagram, which like the prison, are panoptical institutions which also came into existence during this new power regime and embody and replicate the structure of this knowledge and power regime.

Due to the surveillance capabilities of modern technology, the prison has never been a more effective panopticon. Similarly, the panopticon of our world has also never been more effective. Panopticism is even more present and relevant to our society than it was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Now, technology like smartphones, computers and cameras make up the infrastructure of our lives, and we need them to communicate, to be employed, and for general survival in modern society. Never before has the knowledge been more all-knowing and the power as all-powerful. New technology has opened up new possibilities for collecting knowledge, which in turn, has increased the power to levels that are now all-encompassing and unavoidable. The power is truly everywhere. “Everywhere” meaning it is implemented in every institution and public space. “Everywhere” meaning the people in power are using and will use the power of this technology to keep us under their control to serve their own interests. But also, “everywhere” meaning it has been internalized by each individual psyche to some degree or another. In the original version of the panopticon, Bentham and Foucault could only imagine separate panoptic settings within physical institutions. For example, the factory was an enclosed panoptical institution, so every day when a factory worker was at work, they experienced the disciplinary gaze. But when they went home at the end of the day, the gaze would stop, and the self-surveillance would cease. Foucault envisioned a time when the panoptic influence extended beyond the walls of the institution. He writes,

...the mechanisms [of the disciplinary establishments] have a certain tendency to become “de-institutionalized,” to emerge from the closed fortresses in which they once functioned and to circulate in a “free” state; the massive, compact disciplines are broken down into flexible methods of control, which may be transferred and adapted... One can [therefore] speak of the formation of a disciplinary society in this movement that stretches from the enclosed disciplines, a sort of social “quarantine,” to an indefinitely generalizable mechanism of “panopticism.”
(Foucault, 211, 216)

Today, panopticism and the gaze has become de-institutionalized, which means it doesn't have to rely on institutions to create a panoptic relationship between the viewer and the viewed. Power occurs everywhere, on all levels, at once. In essence, our entire society embodies the structure of the Panopticon. As we saw in the original model, knowledge works with power in two ways. First, it increases the people in the watchtower's ability to use the bodies of the prisoners to achieve their goals as an institution. In our capitalist society in which power is linked to money, knowledge is excavated from human beings through mass surveillance technology and data collection to make money. Profit is the goal of the panopticon of our society. The second way knowledge increases power is the knowledge the prisoners have that they are being watched, which causes them to self-surveil and inflict power upon themselves. Today, our knowledge of all the ways we are being surveilled everyday by the people around us, especially because of social media, has caused self-censorship to be a common part of the way we exist. By surveilling ourselves and others, we socially replicate the power dynamics of the panopticon.

The Panopticon is even more relevant now than the period Foucault writes about, firstly because knowledge is becoming the foundation of our economy, which means capitalism is

taking a panoptic structure. Shoshanna Zubroff calls this idea “surveillance capitalism,” which is the idea that knowledge, or data collected from human beings, is a new valuable commodity which social media and the digital age made possible. Data collection is an entire industry that happens behind the scenes of daily life. So often when we buy a convenient product which makes our lives easier, these products are also data collectors. Most of the money the company makes from these products isn’t the revenue generated by the sale, it’s by selling the data the products collect from us. Even when we are aware that these companies are extracting knowledge from us, which we are usually oblivious to, we are often completely left in the dark about what these companies do with our data, who they’re selling it to, and what these third parties are using it for. Zubroff gives the example of the Google Nest home security system. Even though it doesn’t say anything about it having a microphone in the manual, and it doesn’t have any capabilities that would require a microphone, someone discovered that Google put microphones in these devices, and when confronted about it, denied that they had any knowledge of it. In this case, they were recording our private conversations within our homes without our knowledge. Next, Google introduced the Nest Thermostat. This time they were transparent about collecting data in the terms and agreements, which explicitly stated that they would be collecting data, and could not be held responsible for what third parties used it for. It also stated that customers could refuse Google to collect their data, but if so, Google would not support the functionality of the product. This means that if we want the products we buy to actually work, we must agree to companies invading our privacy.

We know that data collection is the entire business model behind companies like Facebook and Google, who were the pioneers of surveillance capitalism, but many other companies now, like Ford Motors for example, have already begun to shift their business model

to take advantage of the financial potential of data collection. Ford's newest models are data collectors with cameras inside and out. The entire economy is shifting around the profitable advantages of surveillance. Companies increase profits by incorporating surveillance into their products and services, because they're not just selling a car, they're selling a data collecting machine. Zubroff points out that now, investors are more likely to invest their money into a company that incorporates data collection into their business model, because those that do are the most successful businesses. Soon, there won't be any businesses without this double agenda. This phenomenon has an eerie resemblance to the power shift which occurred during the Age of Reason. If we remember, during this period, new methods of organizing workers to increase capitalist profits also opened up new possibilities for controlling human populations in general, and soon, the panoptic structure became the standard for every institution in Europe and the United States. The new capabilities of collecting knowledge enabled by the panoptic structure made their operations more efficient than they had ever been before. Thinking about these clear parallels, and the repetitive nature of history, this appears to be the direction we're going in this new stage of capitalism. And as we already know from the prison, knowledge collection, power, and profit are interconnected. The ways in which knowledge is used to make humans more profitable under capitalism goes hand in hand with the ways in which power is exercised upon us in general.

Modern technology is marketed as having its main priority in improving the quality of our lives but is actually completely invested in power. This is another prison parallel, because the prison is marketed as a system of justice which necessarily improves our lives, when it's really all about power. Capitalist companies and institutions are in the business of power, and nothing else. They only care about human beings when our lives can be used to help them reach their

goals. Not only have the ways they collect data about us expanded, but the type of data they collect is ever more detailed. In the panopticon, knowledge was primarily based on human behavior, and this knowledge could be traced back to individuals. Now, when we post a photo on Facebook, the least important part of the photo is anything that has to do with you as an individual. Rather, millions of photographs of the millions of Facebook users are closely analyzed by artificial intelligence to learn about human facial cues and behavior and are trained to predict human behavior. This knowledge has gone far beyond having stakes for our individual lives. Now, we are being analyzed collectively, as a whole species. There have been many cases we know about where companies in the United States have sold data to the Chinese government, which has used this data to target oppressed groups and track down protestors. Data collected by new Amazon trucks which have cameras which surveil the driver and the streets and drivers' views at all times, can easily be handed over or sold to law enforcement. Considering the surveillance of communities of color by the police discussed earlier, the vast reach of this new technology has dangerous implications for the power of the police over all of us, but especially those most vulnerable. The stakes are now for democracy and the entirety of humanity.

Living in a Panoptic world under disciplinary power which is invested in incarcerating, surveilling, and dehumanizing people for profit, how have we, the individuals trapped inside it, been affected by the internalized knowledge that we're always been watched? How have our personal relationships been infected, and our social movements bamboozled by this power regime? We already know the extent to which surveillance now dominates our society. It is just as true that the impact it has had on our individual behavior has increased exponentially. The second way knowledge operates in the Panopticon is through the prisoners knowing that they are being watched from all angles, all the time. The original model was designed so that it didn't

matter if someone was physically in the watchtower observing. At any given moment, the prisoners had to assume they were being watched, and act according to the norms imposed upon them. Today, we live with the knowledge that we *are* literally always being watched. In his article, “Surveillance, Panopticism, and Self-Discipline in the Digital Age,” Ivan Manokha discusses the “technologies of the self,” or, “the manner in which panoptic settings make individuals perform *on themselves*, without coercion, different operations and exercises of power...” (Manokha 220) Self-surveillance and lateral-surveillance are the most extreme effects of living in a panoptic world. Lateral surveillance is surveilling people around you, and self-surveillance is the experience of changing your own behavior because you know the people around you are also surveilling you. In modern society, everyone is surveilling themselves and each other at once, and everyone knows it, so it becomes part of the social culture. These practices became more prevalent with the advent of social media, which is another “panoptic setting.” But they are now just as present offline, because of the effects social media has had on social interaction everywhere.

The “chilling effect” is what Manokha describes as the experience of individuals starting to change and restrain their own behavior once they become aware that they are under surveillance. These changes are made specifically “to be in conformity with the perceived norms or expectations of the surveyors.” (Manokha 228) This “chilling effect” which occurs in the panopticon, also happened on a massive scale in the United States in 2013 after Edward Snowden, a government whistle-blower, exposed that the National Security Agency had been secretly invading the privacy of millions of people. After stories about Snowden’s discoveries were made public, numerous studies were undertaken, which showed that a large number of individuals changed their behavior both online and offline. These behavioral changes were

connected to the increased awareness of the public that they were being watched. It's important to note that there was no change in the surveillance practices themselves. The only thing that changed was the public's knowledge that they were being surveilled. Many of us consider the knowledge which Snowden revealed to be for our benefit. It would make sense that by revealing the extent of the gaze, Snowden gave back some of the power to the people. But if we think back, a crucial piece in the way panoptic power works, is the objects of observation being aware that they're being observed. Snowden's whistle blowing completed the puzzle of disciplinary power, allowing it to take full effect. The increase in the unprecedented scope of surveillance which has occurred in modern society only realized its full potential of power once it became public and widespread knowledge that we are being watched. In other words, the knowledge that we are being watched is what allows the power to manifest within us.

Interestingly, people who experience the "chilling effect," aren't concerned with the gaze of the government or corporations. Research shows that most people who self-surveil are most concerned with the gaze of their peers. Monokha cites a number of studies which show that self-censorship on social media is connected to the user's perceived audience. Users are painfully aware that everything they say and post will be judged by multiple audiences and eyes, which comes into play when deciding how to express themselves. As a result, before they post something, they censor it based on what they think most people will perceive as non-offensive. One study even showed a connection between "higher diversity of friendship circles (and) higher self-censorship." (Monokha 230) Additionally, the design structure of platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter parallel the structure of the panopticon. Individual profiles which resemble individual cells, encourage us to identify ourselves individually rather than collectively, which is a key aspect of the panopticon. These platforms are also knowledge-making machines.

The capabilities of posting, direct messaging, commenting, and all different ways of interacting with other users, ensures a constant accumulation of knowledge about every user. This knowledge becomes public information on every individual, that can be traced back to their personal reputation. The panopticon of social media is interesting because both the watchtower and the walls that prevent the criminals from interacting are gone, but the power dynamics are still there because of the knowledge. Users act as both the observer and the observed and replicate disciplinary power socially. Everyone is responsible for both obeying the norms and enforcing them, creating a culture of social surveillance. Further research has shown that self-censorship doesn't stop on social media. Because of the ever-presence of recording devices like cameras and cell phones, people are starting to experience the same pressure to appeal to multiple audiences offline as they do online. Monokha calls this the "extended chilling effect," where the power which effects how we socially interact with each other online, spreads to our offline interactions. The practices of lateral-surveillance and self-surveillance which became the norm on social media, has influenced social norms everywhere else.

The reason why these behaviors so smoothly move from realm to realm, from online to offline, and as we will see in a moment, from the prison to social media, is because power exists and sustains itself through social relationships. Foucault defines power in general as a dynamic process, meaning it occurs from moment to moment, and is reproduced through a network of ongoing social relationships. Foucault writes that "power is everywhere not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (HS, 93) He compares the way power operates to the way a relationship operates. Both entail an ongoing agreement or consensus of the way things have been, along with a mutual continuation of the way things are going to be, through predictable actions that align with the norm. Rather than being exercised forcefully upon

people by a dominant agent, power is something we all agree to. An example would be office staff following protocol when the boss fires an employee. In this scenario, the office staff are agents, and the boss is the dominant agent. Although there may be a dominant agent who inflicts power onto someone else, their actions would not have any power if the other agents didn't go along with it. In this way, power doesn't have to be inflicted to secure its continuation, it just has to be agreed to through social alignments. Power in general is socially replicated, which is especially true for disciplinary power specifically, because its centralized within people, who are social animals. Therefore, it makes sense that this power has influenced the nature of our personal identities and relationships. Because it occurs socially, power is constantly in motion, and cannot be confined to specific realms. This explains how power relations on social media, as we have seen, can easily spread to how we interact with one another in real life, and even how power relations which occur in larger structures like the prison system, can easily become replicated in smaller social spaces, like social media.

Now we can see how living in a society which is rapidly evolving into a panoptic form has affected our social behaviors, how the structure of social media itself encourages us to act as both the gaze and the prisoners, and how power swarms to every corner of society through movements of social interaction. We can now turn to cancel culture, a social justice movement on social media, which is commonly held as the new mode of leftist activism. But like the prison, which is a system of power marketed as a system of justice, cancel culture calls itself justice while merely replicating the power dynamics of the prison. Unbeknownst to the many people on social media who participate in cancel culture, the power dynamics of our entire society have been internalized by us, which influences our behavior and social interactions. Through the social engagements of power on social media, people determine the norms that are enforced

upon one another. Social justice culture today, which is committed to issues like racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia, has a very specific set of ideas and language, which are upheld as the norms to be followed in order to participate in the movement. When these norms are broken by an individual, the social response is to cancel them. Canceling someone is when the group marks an individual as violating the established norm and this information becomes publicized, resulting in a campaign of punishment by an anonymous crowd of other social media users. This individual is labeled as being “problematic,” or some version of “bad,” which justifies subjecting them to incessant harassment on and offline. The process of cancelation has an undeniable resemblance to the way power is exercised over prisoners when they are systematically labeled delinquents. The role canceled people have in social media activism is the same role criminals have for “normal” people in society today, which is the scapegoat. Cancel culture is an example of how the power dynamics of the prison are socially replicated and shows us just how much this power has been ingrained within us. Like the prison, cancel culture does not achieve justice, and to think that it does, would be a mistake. To make sure we don’t repeat ourselves, a new movement towards true justice must be begin with a thorough understanding of exactly how power within our larger society operates as well as how it influences us.

The podcast *Fucking Cancelled*, is a critique of the current practices of the political left by leftist socialist anarchists, Clementine and Jay. In episode nine, the hosts, who have both experienced being canceled, analyze and discuss all the details about how cancellations work. First, they define canceling as, “the process of being subjected to a campaign of harassment, which extends to your friends and supporters. It is an abusive practice that aims to entirely isolate someone and rob them of their material resources until they bend to the will of the mob.” (....) Cancellation starts on the internet, when Person A decides to call out Person B for

something they have done, which, they deem to be “problematic,” based on the rules of online social justice culture. People can be cancelled for a range of reasons, from interpersonal issues like sexual harassment, to ideological issues like posting something on the internet which someone else did not agree with. In many cases, people are canceled for something they did years ago, which the canceler digs up from their past. In all cases, knowledge about them is used against them to justify their cancellation. The canceler makes this information public on social media, which is meant to show the audiences of both parties “the truth” about who they are as a person. The intention is to expose and punish them for breaking the norms of social justice culture. A lot of the time, the accusations are blurry, and the initial accusation gets lost in the heat of the mob. But once a cancellation has been initiated, the power takes effect, and everyone knows what to do. Sometimes the intentions of the original canceler get lost, and they can lose control when the power of social alignment takes over.

Canceled people in social justice culture bear the same role as delinquent-labeled criminals in the larger society. In the same way penitentiary technology doesn’t care about the exact actions of the criminal, in cancel culture, what the person did is the *least* important factor in determining how a cancellation plays out. The actions of criminals and canceled people alike are only relevant in catalyzing the processes of power. What matters is not *what* they did, but *how* what they did can be used to create a picture of them as a bad person. This is essentialism, which is at the heart of cancel culture, as well as delinquency. Essentialism is used to misrepresent people and overstate what they did. Cancel culture takes “they sexually assaulted someone in high school” and essentializes it into “they are an abuser.” Here, one action is being used to create a judgement about a person’s entire character. The rest of the story, which can include the circumstances of the situation, whether or not the behavior has continued, and even

the victim's perspective, are erased. The nuances in what it means to be human are ignored, the real goal being to hammer home how bad of a person they are. Any information which doesn't support this central claim, is irrelevant. The process of reducing the canceled person and the criminal to their actions, which effectively dehumanizes them, makes them deserving of punishment. For the criminal, this occurs through inflicting the delinquent label, which justifies their legal enslavement, subjection to torture, and loss of human rights even after their release. For the canceled person, the specific label given to show that you're "problematic" justifies social ostracization and continuous abuse from a mob of strangers who are personally out to get you. You are not being punished for what you did, you are punished for who you are.

The process of delinquency that occurs in the prison is replicated in cancel culture. Once the targeted individual has been labeled a "bad person" by the anonymous social media mob, anyone is free to harass and threaten them as much as they want. It is common for canceled people to receive an onslaught threatening messages and emails from strangers, mean comments, tags, shares, and a bombardment of harassment from people who they've never met. Another common practice is doxing, which is posting personal information such as the phone number or address of the canceled person, to encourage harassment, and make it harder for the person to escape it. It doesn't matter if what they are saying is cruel or untrue, because the system of power allows it. One reason why total strangers are able to express genuine hatred toward the canceled person and unleash full attacks on them is because the canceled person is further essentialized as a symbol for the problem. Because the power defines canceled people as individual embodiments of issues like sexism and racism, the people in the mob can project their personal anger toward these issues onto these individuals. Someone accused of sexual assault is held responsible for all

sexual assault, and they become scapegoats onto which we can project our rage toward entire systems of oppression, which often seem so out of our control.

Another example of canceled people providing a similar role as delinquents is as follows. Living in an online culture of fear, in which everyone is desperately self-surveilling and trying to avoid backlash, an easy way to feel like a “good” person is with the presence of “bad” people to distinguish ourselves from. Participating in canceling people provides momentary peace from the anxiety of self-surveillance. For a moment, we are in the safe zone, we are the normal ones, we are safe from the mob because we’re part of it. Cancel culture also exacerbates paranoia in the culture of surveillance, because people are constantly afraid of being canceled. Many people who participate in cancellations are coming from a place of fear and desperation. But even if we are part of the mob, we are never truly exempt from cancellation because everyone within the mob is still laterally surveilling one another.

The call to action of a cancellation is often a threat in and of itself, because if you don’t join in the campaign of abuse, you are presumed to be just as bad as the canceled. This comes from the normal/abnormal dichotomy, which we see as a function of power in the prison and the larger society. You are either normal or abnormal, you are either good or bad, and there is no in-between. The rules of dualism state that if you disagree with cancel culture, you are a supporter of sexual abuse, without an in-between. Taking a neutral stance or defending the accused are not allowed, because dualism defines anyone who is not part of the gaze as the delinquent, or the canceled. Not being part of the mob can even be used as grounds to cancel you. Even if you’d rather not be involved in canceling someone, don’t really care, or have no stake in it, there is always a social incentive to participate because the power is reproduced socially. Anyone who has been on social media enough to witness cancellations, participate in them, or has actually

been canceled, knows the feeling of fear and paranoia that comes with existing in its culture. Even if you are confident that you are a good person, in your ability to obey the norms, or your ability to simply avoid being “problematic,” no one is completely free from its wrath. This is because cancel culture is about power, not justice. It doesn’t matter if you’re a good person or a bad person. No one is safe because no one has control of the power. As we saw in the prison as well, the system of power can be used against us to further any specific agenda.

Once the label has been created, lateral surveillance is used to initiate the mob and take away the entire support system of the canceled person, so that, like a felon, they are socially ostracized, alone in their experience of power, and unable to recover from their label. Just as Monokha discussed with the “extended chilling effect,” online systems of power can have real consequences for what happens in the real world. Lateral surveillance works in cancellations by pressuring the canceled person’s friends and supporters to publicly denounce them. The harassment won’t stop until they publicly cut ties with the canceled person. Because the stigma of the canceled is brought upon all of their friends and supporters, it’s common for many trusted friends of the canceled person to flat out abandon them to avoid cancellation or harassment. Attempts at even more social and financial debilitation are pursued, as the mob can make demands on the canceled person, to quit their job, de-platform, stop attending community events, or stop participating in creative projects. Once their entire social support system and means for survival are taken away, they have successfully been canceled, and can never redeem themselves. They are otherized, marginalized, social delinquents. Many of the people and activities that previously gave their life meaning will never be returned to them. This ruthless and disturbing process that unfolds under cancel culture, as we have seen again and again, has undeniable parallels to the way our society treats felons, who are legally discriminated against

and intentionally denied support, so they end up back in the system. These systems are built so that people bend and break.

Cancel culture is a product of social media, disciplinary power, and a carceral society. These comparisons to the prison matter because they show that canceling people online doesn't change anything. The new wave of social justice on social media merely replicates the fake "justice" of the prison. Living in a carceral society has influenced how we define justice and deal with people who have broken the rules, and as social animals, we unknowingly replicate these systems of power on smaller, personal levels. It's alarming to think that good intentioned movements and activists, many of whom are deeply invested in and committed to racial justice, have used cancel culture as a means of change, when unbeknownst to them, they are using the same foundational power dynamics as a racist institution. I think the majority of people who have participated in, stood by, or initiated a cancellation have good intentions. From the outside, canceling looks like a productive way to reach our goals. We're just doing what feels natural because it's the social consensus. Everyone has agreed that this is the right way to handle the situation, that this is what justice is.

The principles of essentialism, dualism, individualism, are ideas we have all internalized, which were brought to the surface through cancel culture. As we have seen, all of these ideas make it harder to recognize peoples' humanity. This is perhaps one of the most dangerous effects of living under disciplinary power, and it serves the purpose of maintaining the power. If we remember, one of the main distinctions between sovereign power and disciplinary power, which makes the latter massively more effective, is its ability to disunify the population. Disunity makes people much easier to control, because if they cannot find common group, they cannot unite against the power. The emphasis on individual identity, disunifies us by splitting the

population into independent individuals, making us feel alone in in our experience of power. It also allows the formation of scapegoats, because we can blame individuals for problems they're not responsible for, while simultaneously using them to feel "normal." We are further turned against other human beings through essentialist labels, when the reality is, we have more in common with them than the people who conduct the forces of power. Disciplinary power also makes the source of power anonymous, so in our social justice movements, when we look for someone to point to and blame, we blame each other because the real enemy is hidden. If we are unable to recognize what we have in common and misdirect our rage toward one another, we have effectively succumbed to the power.

If our methods of change are carceral and dehumanizing in nature, we are just perpetuating the same problems we are trying to solve. Cancel culture is an example of trying to use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house. We cannot solve these problems with the same lens through which we experience them. We have to look at the whole picture differently and imagine new ways of thinking about justice that are unrelated to the prison. I hope that by showing how it works, it becomes self-evident that blaming the mob is not the solution to ending cancel culture, just like cancel culture is not the solution to ending racism, sexism, and all other forms of oppression. If our social movements are about change to benefit people, we also must believe that people can change, and give them the chance to. We must take the side of human beings, instead of abandoning them. If we believe change in society is possible, we must necessarily believe that people can also change. Breaking the cycle of abuse requires showing compassion for abusers. If these cycles of power are fueled by fear, dehumanization and hatred, I believe that more fear and hatred only add fuel to the fire. In my view, the most productive way to break them is through compassion and love for all human beings. As cliché as it sounds, we

must be the change we wish to see. If we want to live in a more just world that values human life, we must value every human life, and resist the oppressive impulses that tempt us to dehumanize and dispose of people. Cancel culture doesn't want to change people, it wants to fix people to make them obedient. Fixing people implies something is wrong with them, which ignores the humanity in making mistakes.

My goal in this essay has been to provide an understanding of how disciplinary power works both in institutions and people, with the purpose of exposing how our social movements have been misdirected by it. In the age of sovereign power, the people were able to both identify the power that oppressed them and find common ground with one another based on the knowledge of this common enemy. I hope that by shifting the spotlight off individuals and back onto the real source of power, we can reunify and embrace our similarities under a system which has weaponized our differences. I hope we can redefine justice and have compassion for human beings instead of canceling them. I don't know exactly what a new movement would look like, but I believe that a strong starting point would be a thorough understanding of how the power works, which would enable us to create a more effective and promising resistance to it. Joseph Rouse, who argues for the political application of Foucault's philosophy, views his work as "a critical knowledge that (speaks) the truth to power, exposing domination for what it is, and thereby enabl(es) or encourage(es) effective resistance to it." (Rouse 102)

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