

From: Inform
Subject: EM: Methods of Carceral War with Orisanmi Burton | 4/23 at 4:15pm | Balch Auditorium

From: Kristen Fass

METHODS OF CARCERAL WAR

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Location: Balch Auditorium

Grounded in a criminalized tradition of Black radical analysis, this lecture reframes “mass incarceration” as carceral war. In doing so, it demystifies the U.S. prison system as a modality of counter-insurgency. Challenging popular conceptions of “correctional institutions” as inert sites of penological intervention, it illuminates the prison’s hidden technologies of subjugation and charts their relation to global archives of colonial power. By theorizing the prison in this way, this talk foregrounds the complex and protracted formations of Black Revolt against which prisons are constantly mobilized. It demonstrates that the imperative of “neutralizing” the very possibility of Black Revolt is a primary historical driver of prison expansion and innovation. Here “method” takes on a dual meaning, referring not only to the techniques through which scholars can apprehend, theorize, and write about this war, but more importantly, how it is concretely imposed and contested. Without understanding carceral spaces as zones of undeclared domestic war, zones that are inextricably linked to imperial and officially acknowledged wars abroad, we cannot fully understand how and why the United States became the global leader of incarceration that it is today, nor will we be able to effectively fight back.

BIOGRAPHY: Orisanmi Burton is an assistant professor of anthropology at American University. His research employs ethnographic and archival methods to examine historical collisions between Black radical organizations and state repression in the United States. Dr. Burton’s work has been published in North American Dialogue, The Black Scholar, Radical History Review, American Anthropologist, among other outlets, and has received support from the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University, and The Margarite Casey Foundation, which selected him as a 2021 Freedom Scholar. Dr. Burton’s first book, entitled Tip of the Spear: Black Radicalism, Prison Repression, and the Long Attica Revolt was published by the University of California Press in October of 2023.



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