



LIAT BEN-MOSHE

DECARCERATING DISABILITY

Deinstitutionalization
and Prison Abolition

A BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE

for *DECARCERATING DISABILITY: Deinstitutionalization
and Prison Abolition*

by Liat Ben-Moshe

PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

“A groundbreaking feminist study of the affinities, interrelations, and contradictions between prison abolition and psychiatric deinstitutionalization. Emphasizing the need for a more expansive field of critical carceral studies, Liat Ben-Moshe compellingly demonstrates the important lessons we can discover through serious engagements with radical disability movements. Scholars and activists alike should read this book without delay!”

—**ANGELA Y. DAVIS**, University of California, Santa Cruz

“Liat Ben-Moshe carefully and incisively models an intersectional approach to abolition grounded in feminist, queer, and crip of color critique. Moving beyond demands for inclusion and critiques of overrepresentation, Ben-Moshe makes a powerful and persuasive case for a disability studies that recognizes state violence as central to its work and the carceral industrial complex as a site for queer coalitions for racial and disability justice. In so doing, she paves the way for thinking not only disability and disability studies differently, but also liberation itself.”

—**ALISON KAFER**, University of Texas at Austin

“A must-read for anyone interested in understanding and dismantling the interlocking systems of incarceration that shape the contemporary political landscape and shorten so many lives. Liat Ben-Moshe shows how the effectiveness of abolitionist work has been limited by the marginalization of disability and anti-sanism analysis and advocacy. She not only exposes how much contemporary abolitionists have to learn from historical struggles for deinstitutionalization, she also demonstrates a more truly intersectional method of abolitionist scholar-activism that we urgently need. This book is both a corrective intervention and a path-breaking tool for developing better strategy toward the world that those who seek liberation are fighting to build.”

—**DEAN SPADE**, Seattle University School of Law

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Liat Ben-Moshe is assistant professor of criminology, law, and justice at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She is coeditor of *Disability Incarcerated: Imprisonment and Disability in the United States and Canada*.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Prison abolition and decarceration are increasingly debated, but it is often without taking into account the largest exodus of people from carceral facilities in the twentieth century: the closure of disability institutions and psychiatric hospitals. *Decarcerating Disability* provides a much-needed corrective, combining a genealogy of deinstitutionalization with critiques of the current prison system.

Liat Ben-Moshe provides groundbreaking case studies that show how abolition is not an unattainable goal but rather a reality, and how it plays out in different arenas of incarceration—antipsychiatry, the field of intellectual disabilities, and the fight against the prison-industrial complex. Ben-Moshe discusses a range of topics, including why deinstitutionalization is often wrongly blamed for the rise in incarceration; who resists decarceration and deinstitutionalization, and the coalitions opposing such resistance; and how understanding deinstitutionalization as a form of residential integration makes visible intersections with racial desegregation. By connecting deinstitutionalization with prison abolition, *Decarcerating Disability* also illuminates some of the limitations of disability rights and inclusion discourses, as well as tactics such as litigation, in securing freedom.

Decarcerating Disability's rich analysis of lived experience, history, and culture helps to chart a way out of a failing system of incarceration.

KEY CONCEPTS

The book presents a call for connecting decarceration, abolition, disability/madness and deinstitutionalization.

What is deinstitutionalization? How is Ben-Moshe's definition different from media portrayals of the process of deinstitutionalization? Or from other scholars' definitions?

What does Ben-Moshe mean by carceral ableism and carceral sanism? How do they relate to carceral feminism? What other examples of this logic can you think of, either from personal experience or popular media?

How would you define abolition? (Use a mind map, tree, or other diagram to extrapolate the components of abolition). What is its relation to decarceration?

Many believe that carceral abolition is too abstract, unrealistic, or utopian and impractical. How does Ben-Moshe address these criticisms of abolition?

One of the recurring themes of the book is its conceptualization of Dis Inc.—the coupling of cultural and social inclusion of minority difference with incorporation through political economic profit making. What are the various instances and ways that Dis Inc. is defined in the book? How does this concept problematize discussions of inclusion and integration?

ANALYSIS

How did the concept of abolition play out in different arenas of incarceration: in anti-psychiatry, deinstitutionalization in the field of intellectual disabilities and the fight against the prison industrial complex? What can we learn from deinstitutionalization for prison abolition and vice versa?

The common narrative regarding deinstitutionalization is that closure of psych facilities and disability residential institutions left people labeled as intellectually, psychiatrically, or developmentally disabled to be housing insecure, and led to their incarceration in jails and prisons. How does Ben-Moshe complicate this narrative, and what does this shift in discourse help reveal?

What are the similarities and differences between resistance to racial versus disability-based segregation in housing, as shown in chapter 5? How can connecting these two arenas aid in illuminating paths for liberation? What are the limits of such strategies?

Many stakeholders were opposed to, and still resist today, decarceration and deinstitutionalization. How do these dynamics differ between stakeholders such as facility workers, unions, families, and those incarcerated? How can coalitions be created to oppose such resistance to decarceration or facility closure?

In chapter 7, Ben-Moshe shows the importance of connecting prisoners' rights litigation to deinstitutionalization class action lawsuits. What is lost when we understand or utilize one but not the other?

METHODOLOGIES

The author explains that race-ability is “the ways race and disability, and racism, sanism, and ableism as intersecting oppressions, are mutually constitutive and cannot be separated, in their genealogy (eugenics, for example), current iterations of resistance (in the form of disability justice, for example), or oppression (incarceration and police killing, for example)” (page 5). Do you find this concept useful? Can you activate it in your own interests and experiences?

The book is grounded in an intersectional analysis of oppression and its resistance. What are some examples in which disability, race, gender or other axis of power and identity were left out of attempts of decarceration and what were the consequences?

On the other hand, what can be gained when a crip/mad of color critique or coalitional politics was or is employed?

The book utilizes Foucault's genealogical methods. “Genealogy allows the researcher to investigate imagined possibilities and carefully construct not just an alternative historiography but also a narrative of what could have been, in knowledges that have been discredited as nonscientific and forgotten” (page 6). What does genealogy enable in this project, to the study of deinstitutionalization, anti-psychiatry and prison abolition? What contingencies does it uncover? What and whose knowledges are buried or excavated?

IMPLICATIONS

What are the limits and gains of using strategies like litigation and exposés in liberating people from sites of incarceration?

How can we think about deinstitutionalization alongside the continued presence of state hospitals, group homes and other institutions? What tools does the book give us to think through the continued existence of disability confinement?

Based on what you learned from the book, what are some ways to abolish carceral locales and logics? What would make these goals realizable?

How does thinking deinstitutionalization and decarceration together reshape our understandings of the histories (and futures) of these movements?

MORE INFO

For more resources, readings, and action items:

www.liatbenmoshe.com/resources