**A Tale of Two States:**

Carceral and Welfare Twist in Discrimination, Neoliberal Polity, and a Divided United States

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**Introduction**

Let’s imagine the state is a planetary system, each mass a different characterization, style, or flavor of the state. They orbit around each other, a system of states. They collide into each other, their compositions and trajectories are the results of particles practically coming out of nowhere, change the shape of things. Through all of this, the carceral and welfare states have gotten themselves into a twist. The carceral state is a range of bureaucratic fields, the criminal-justice system of late. Its history stretches from slavery, baked into American jurisprudence. The welfare state is also a range of bureaucratic fields, younger and far less mainstream, often popularly legitimized on either moral or economic grounds. Organizations and social classes, among others, hang in the balance; they shape and try to shape the composition and trajectory of the states. Perceptions and representations of deservingness determine how resources are allocated. If individuals, or clusters of, are deemed deserving of punishment, or assistantial aid, if their needs are presented politically and powered by organizational action, the folks will ‘get what they deserve’: (some) norms, values, and expectations are embedded in the state, and redistribution ties in deservingness. But who in society is deserving of sustenance, of maternal carrots and paternal sticks? To consider these two states, we must consider the matrix of domination—an understanding of intersectional oppression across multiple dimensions, “the overall social organization within which intersecting oppressions originate, develop, and are contained” (Collins 2000: 227-228). Discrimination has characteristics and tendencies, they must be tackled holistically and cohesively, if at all. When the carceral orbits around welfare, welfare appears punitive and paternalist. When welfare orbits around a carceral state, incarceration assists individuals to make a better life for themselves. Our astral bodies could more fully collide into each other to some dystopian setup where the affected population in their entirety lives and works in a carceral structure that feeds and clothes them. The state could assume full responsibility for their care, restricting, but not eliminating, agency.

Discrimination runs rampant and much of the problem lies beyond the veil of human minds. How do you see implicit prejudice in individuals or implemented systems? People are treated inequitably, similar actions yield different responses (or lack thereof) from the state with respect to deservingness on particularities, such as on drug use, sleeping with others, disagreeable appropriations of funds, and raising your children. It’s perhaps a little creepy and dizzying (Handler describes as “eerie” (Wacquant 2009: 107)) to see the ways in which welfare and criminal-justice come together. Both states were reformed by the same politicians around the same times, the same players appear in both plays—historical locus points around Reagan and Clinton as practically likeminded reformers (79; 89). Clientele, stakeholders, are shamed and slandered in the public square, with corresponding stereotypes promulgated, indicative of a matrix of domination. They inform and are informed by stereotypes and prejudice. Everyone has prejudice, it is not enough to say such flagrant discrimination occurs simply because of prejudice. Humans cannot function without it, we all act on our prior beliefs. Prejudice holds and constructs power; our fears of the others make a (terribly negative) difference in the lives of the ones we fear. People policed (for economically motivated crimes, but also in general) are likely to come from the same population clusters as people in need of, or receiving welfare such that prison becomes a “surrogate ghetto” (Wacquant 2009: 195). There are more and more pockets of deep poverty left behind; those above and outside can’t hear any screaming. It’s hard to look down, to see how hard it is, the multitude of forces against, a political tidal wave tilting toward corporate and conservative over cooperative.

Prejudice informs power over time, results in phobia in the form of projected disposition towards deservingness, *the carceral and welfare states coalesce.* I outline more generally how the United States allocates resources to give sustenance to the deserving in need, yet employs a controlling, surveilling, and oft-punitive tactical array. I explore how such policies are intended to helppeople in need, and not to exploit them, yet continued, perpetuated exploitation and domination occurs, relating back to deservingness with respect to social class. These pressures are applied unequally, fueled by class prejudices and institutional power. They result in discrimination, reproduction of the matrix of domination, and a segregated and oblivious society in the United States.

**Part 1:** (Trying to) **Help the Poor Help Themselves…**

Labor expectations and requirements which fail to consider structural inequalities or give too much weight to practically nonexistent trends perhaps as if they are structural inequalities come from our prejudices on who should or shouldn’t be held financially responsible for themselves, *powered* by the idea that simply purported failure to work may constitute irresponsibility to the point of moral failing and criminality. Edin & Shaefer ask what happens when “the two become commingled, almost indistinguishable from each other […] The old poverty was linked to an economy based on exploitation of the worst sort. But there were still jobs to be had” (Edin & Shaefer 2015: 144). There used to be a stronger cash floor, a safety net, and without jobs or cash, “entrenched poverty” over decades meets “poverty of the deepest sort” (144). If they cannot help themselves right, you must *make* them help themselves and if they cannot adhere, they are not worthy. Prejudice applied into power. The policed are held in poverty, and poor people are punished. A critically failing formal economy creates demand for a shadow economy, which then may be policed. Welfare for the undeserving is publicly flayed as “lavish” or “coddling”, “robbing ordinary Americans committed to work, morality, and respectability of their fair shot at ‘the American dream’” (Wacquant 2005: 130).

Welfare programs demand stakeholder participation in the labor force, yet jobs available are becoming ever more precarious and insecure. Welfare programs demand from their stakeholders work and keep a paying job in a hostile economy, yet frame all matters as questions of personal responsibility/failure; aid as an entitlement and not an economic right. As if destined to fail, the personal work responsibility law, “—and this is revealing of the intentions of the legislators—*had absolutely no jobs component”* (Wacquant 2009: 85). Instead of aid to mothers with dependent children we get “obligation for parents to work within two years as well as sets a lifetime cap of five years of support” (88). “Not coincidentally, it was also in 1996 that Congress passed the Prison Litigation Reform Act that sharply curtailed convicts’ access to the federal courts” (89). Simply emphasizing “‘traps’ that stymie anti-poverty efforts” only study the poor in isolation, instead what is “poverty governance […] highlights organized efforts to redirect the exercise of public authority” from rule-based authority to competition-based tactics (Soss et al. 2009: 1). So, what happens if/when you can’t compete? Better hope you planned ahead, or have friends that like you, the logic goes lest you fall deeper into the pit, the successful won’t hear you slip. Gingrich, studying “lone mothers’ experiences of the design, delivery, and enforcement of workfare” that is, policies that require labor participation in exchange for aid in the context of “labor market restructuring” ultimately there exist “procedures and practices that result in *enforced and managed precariousness* as random and limiting employment-preparation programs; ambiguous and complex regulations; and capricious and punitive service delivery” (Gingrich 2010: 109) [emphasis mine]. Precarity and insecurity in labor expands, “the more insecure fractions of the American proletariat are now *dependent on poverty-level wage labor; the brittle social economy based on the family, and the parallel circuits* of informal and criminal enterprise” (Wacquant 2009: 97-98).

Welfare programs monitor stakeholders as if they are criminal; personally irresponsible to the point of amorality.[[1]](#footnote-1) Criminal is a statist label, enforced, propagated per the discretion of prejudiced humans. These are punitive and paternalist welfare policies with precedent in the carceral state. Wacquant outlines two modalities of state-sponsored poverty: (1) “Reorganizing social services into an instrument of surveillance” (2) “control of the categories indocile to the new economic and moral order” (Wacquant 2009: 58-60). A moral order in which failure to behave entrepreneurially is disagreeable to norms beliefs and values. Such failure could easily justify classifying a person as undeserving. Experience structures prejudice; people generalize with exposure over time; whole classes get ruled out. Assistance usually comes with double-standard strings attached. The poor are not trusted to adequately handle their responsibilities, as if, by and large, they cannot ration the way you want them to, that this is simply a matter of insufficient discipline. Earlier welfare critics like Lawrence Mead argue telling the poor what to do is akin to teaching them how to fish, insurance your money spent on worms isn’t going down the lake. These programs create a welfare recipient class, a distinct group at risk of being shamed and attacked. Schram & Soss summarize the process as “demonizing” asking, “Can policymakers actually believe that welfare recipients squander their government benefits on [luxuries]? Perhaps” (Schram & Soss 2015). Punitive policies including incarceration create and keep poor people in need and thus open to the whims of others’ prejudices, resulting in opinions on deservingness. Welfare fraud is treated as an incredibly serious offense, and this provides a window to understanding structural opinions on deservingness. Edin & Shaefer highlight a case, a terribly hyperbolic example—While Jennifer and her young daughter lived with uncle José, he molested the girl, but at least he didn’t sell his SNAP benefits, a practice of converting money allocated to buy food to a lot less hard-cash, usually in order to pay other bills: “at least in terms of the letter of the law, when Jennifer sells her SNAP, she risks a far longer prison term than the one José was subject to for molesting Kaitlin” (Edin & Shaefer 2015: 110 ). I believe this is absurd beyond internal normative logic. If this were more popular, widespread, the sympathy would be there. Things might not be the way they are. The way in which policies sheer from lived experiences of poor people offers insight to a contradiction fueling the carceral and welfare states as they are. For now, suffice that poor people are punished, literally, quite zealously, for taking advantage of the state and power, meanwhile they can be taken advantage of quite readily.

Living wage and/or middle class jobs are increasingly difficult to get and keep when they even exist, and the more you rely on state aid, the more at risk to be shamed and attacked on moral, criminal grounds. “[L]aying the blame on a lack of personal responsibility,” Edin & Shaefer write, “obscures the fact that there are powerful and ever-changing structural forces at play here.” Low-wage jobs compel workers into conditions “middle-class professionals would never accept” in both job and market, “the jobs themselves too often set workers up for failure” (Edin & Shaefer 2015: 45). Workers and applicants are subject to corporate surveillance, exposing them to arbitrary judgements. Perhaps they cannot officially be discriminated by race, gender, or class, but the more data you have, the easier time you’ll have if you’re already looking for a reason not to hire or keep someone. For example, an applicant to Wal-Mart (who very well might be the only hiring employer in town) must provide their Social Security number, home address (whether you live in a shelter), agree to any number of unscheduled drug tests, race, ethnicity, gender, whether received TANF, SNAP, and/or SSI, a personality quiz/survey asking questions such as from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’ evaluate “I frequently change the way I approach job activities” or whether you “When your opinions about how to solve a problem has differed from your supervisor’s” do you “[talk] through the problem with your supervisor to reach a compromise”, or “[combine] your ideas with your supervisor’s to come up with a solution jointly”, among other datum (49). The poor are both made invisible *and* heavily surveilled. Their lives are pushed out of private into the public sphere and stripped of social context. Deflating welfare invisibilizes, “urban marginality by transferring it from the public domain to the private sphere of the family and the market” (Wacquant 2009: 98). Welfare benefits require work, living-wage labor is hard to find; benefits do not fill in the rest, and this all can seem very negative, as if it’s consistently solely poor people’s fault, failure to function in the market is personal failure.

None of this happens equitably, instead it reproduces the matrix of domination. Criminals are prevented from participation in the labor force by policy or stigma attached to actions by the carceral state—known as the problem of “Checking the box” on employment applications. Implementing criminal-justice-type strategies risks stigmatizing aid recipients without any need of prosecuting positivist acts, commission of crimes. In other words, the poor are mega-shamed. They are easy targets, low hanging fruit to establish social order. Universally-tested means are not treated as entitlements, but as elements of membership in state-society. As are tax refunds—uniting factors that can build solidarity across economic classes. They fuel feelings of belonging in their stakeholders and not as if one is a leech. Social Security still requires its stakeholders to pay into the system, which means that they labor just like in means-tested assistance, however, they carry a different, more positive psychosocial effect. They do not single-out the poor as different, shame them, or expect them to leap through a series of hoops. Programs such as EITC Edin & Shaefer describe as “revolutionary” because they “fold the poor back into society” treating stakeholders “like any other American” (Edin & Shaefer 2015: 172). Though the gendered and racialized dimensions of aid participation changed to better incorporate women and people of color, as welfare policy changed to AFDC to TANF, their lived experiences remained systematically disregarded in principal framing, policy implementation, and execution.

**Part 2: …That Winds Up as Discrimination**

Ghettoization with occupation-style policing and retrenched social services fixes inequality into particular geographic regions, where racialized and gendered prejudice in policymakers and public opinion connected with media portrayal determines *discriminatorily* the composition of policing and social services, the expressions of deservingness and the application of power in society; this reproduces phobia. Prejudice’s “ingrained”-ness presents a challenge for those who wish to see it gone. Soss uses this word discussing racial assumptions, quoted below, but I believe it is other sorts of assumptions – phobias – as well besides racialization. Presenting people’s actions and failures on a platter of ‘sameness’ is discriminatory. The whole thing is racist and misogynist—not simply prejudices, but phobias. I prefer the term ‘phobia’ because it captures both psychological aversion and structural inequality, or discrimination. They are the product of the matrix of domination, taking into account the psycho-neurological structured structures and structuring structures you cannot see. To use Bourdeausian theory, phobia is homology in habitus, except instead of being across fields, it plays across conflicts in the classes themselves, irrespective of field. Phobias run a range of typologies, from implicit to blatant. I believe they can have similar behaviors regardless of any particular social class or dimension. You’re likely to react with shame and anger if you feel racist, sexist, homophobic, etc. But this does not mean that all oppression is the same, though it travels across the same channels. For example, imposing principles of ‘sameness’ across people in differing social classes and subgroups when their lived experiences and positioning in social and economic structure achieves anything but. Historical understanding highlights racialized and gendered discrimination.

Expectations to work held across sex and gender is discriminatory; it fails to consider structural inequality, the demands of child caregiving, the lack of jobs available that would allow you to provide for yourself and your children. Expectations that recipients work in order to receive assistantial aid, with strict lifetime caps, presents individuals as is, without understanding social context, as if everyone can raise themselves to the same standard. Welfare reform eliminated “social rights and caregiving as bases for making claims; it expand[ed] the role of the market; and it mark[ed] a shift in patterns of stratification toward gender ‘sameness’ in that mothers and fathers must be employed” (Orloff 2002: 96). The employed fails to consider the fact that women, and not men, can become pregnant, or gendered divisions and expectations of labor (100). Privileging wealthier women’s ability to have children more strongly impacts women of color. This is when the carceral state enters as the sole provider of “social service” in poor communities, the bringer of masculinity (Wacquant 2009: 15). “[W]omen cope and resist” Gingrich argues, “reconfiguring workfare participation as a valid, yet precarious, form of paid work” (Gingrich 2010: 109). PROWRA replaced “an entitlement – a conditional social right – for poor single mothers to care for their children full-time […] is especially significant for […] single mothers with poor earnings capacities and heavy caregiving burdens, and racialized and ethnic minority people who suffer from relatively high rates of poverty and unemployment” compelling people into private charities (Orloff 2002: 99). Phobia against women comes packaged as expectations that workers are workers, that feminism is ‘women at work’, stripping away social conditions such that they are invisibilized and not available for consideration. Prejudice and power produce this sort of domination, were the empowered to experience a similar hindrance I do not believe systems would entertain it. Phobia can be quiet. But when you are aware of it, and if you see it as a problem, the logic goes, you’re liable to take steps to think differently.

Much of racial oppression occurs through criminal law enforcement. The legal activity economy dries, what precarious jobs there were topple and crumble, jobs education and other constructive social services disappear, leaving only the police. The story can go something like this: Poor people are disproportionately Black and people of color. When they are policed, which occurs more heavily and more punitively than in less colored communities, they are then more likely to be arrested, and less likely to afford the cost of bailing out of jail, thus stay in jail, thus lose out on more and more earnings potential, housing, formal-economically helpful social connections, and are otherwise further traumatized. Because this scenario is pre-trial detention, it can easily occur regardless of if a crime is committed. If the welfare state were more functional, one might then think, they could afford the cost of bail; or if the carceral state were less repressive, there wouldn’t be bail without considering social factors, the likelihood that they appear in court when they’re supposed to. Federal laws prevent welfare, disability, veterans’ benefits, and food stamps from going to anyone held in detention. They are prevented from working in government-related jobs. Their parental rights and access to federal benefits are curtailed. They are banished from Section 8 housing. Those convicted of felony drug use or sale are prevented for lifefrom public housing. Any drug-related offense bars from receiving any public grant, loan, or work assistance (Wacquant 2005). Black people are simply not viewed as deserving in American society. Racial discrimination with respect to aid (and almost all other functions of the US government) was extant long before ‘90’s “welfare reform” but five years after TANF, “more than three-fifths of welfare families in the least stringent state programs were classified as white, while more than three-fifths of those in the restrictive programs were identified as black” (Soss 2012). Welfare has not retrenched equally, there is also a strong racialized component built into physical spaces—the creation of the “(hyper)ghetto” (Wacquant 2009: 195). Stakeholders often occupy the same spaces, but are disjoint—the incarcerated do not receive welfare *per se*. If we include the 7 percent receiving disability or retirement benefits and the 3 percent on the unemployment rolls, it turns out that less than one-quarter of jail detainees received some government support” (Wacquant 2009: 70). In one lawsuit, a county lawyer argued jail helps poor people, “they ‘want’ to be there, especially ‘if it’s a cold week’” (New York Times 2017). Citing a Milwaukee study, “the average white applicant with no criminal record had to apply for only three jobs to get a callback, while a white job seeker with a criminal record had to apply for six […] the average black applicant with no criminal record had to apply for seven jobs to get a callback, while a black job seeker with a felony conviction had to put in twenty applications” (Edin & Shaefer 2015: 53). Formerly-incarcerated people are excluded from social redistribution—they both cannot get a job, and they cannot get aid. Here the carceral and welfare states play off each other terribly, they do not bother borrowing tactics, but rather construct exclusionary qualifications based on each other’s presence. In the Social Security Administration’s quest to detect and prevent erroneous payments, they, “have targeted only residents of jails and prisons and left out inmates of other public institutions such as hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, shelters, and drug and alcohol rehabilitation centres, who are also legally ineligible for aid but mostly middle class” (Wacquant 2005: 132), highlighting a contradiction as if it’s meant to be there. I can’t go into the minds of Social Security, means-tested aid administrators, bureaucrat agents, all I can do is highlight the intersectional ways they single out oppressed classes with a pummeling effect

Caricature stereotypes solidified racialized and gendered misperceptions of poverty, fueling discrimination, the result of prejudice and power. Soss identifies prejudice, “racial stereotypes operating below the level of conscious reflection are more likely to influence people’s decisions and actions when cues in the situation trigger ingrained racial assumptions” (Soss 2012). Stereotypes personified in the welfare queen. Ronald Reagan, extending war on crime to war on drugs, “made the outrageous image of the ‘welfare queen’ into a powerful metaphor for the idea that hard-working, law-abiding Americans were being exploited by the lazy and criminal poor” (Soss et al. 2009: 11). Wacquant outlines three other stereotypes:

the African-American teenage mother, a ‘baby having babies’ often raised on welfare herself, whose immaturity is matched only by her moral depravity and dissolute sexuality; the lower-class ‘deadbeat dad,’ typically black and unemployed, who impregnates women left and right and flippantly abandons them and his offspring to the care of the taxpayers; […] elderly immigrant from the Third World who slips into the United States to manipulate welfare into a cost-free high-class retirement […] orchestrated by an endless stream of journalistic, political, and scholarly reports, was presented as living proof of the fundamentally corrupting nature of public assistance (p. 84)

It is difficult to ascribe intentionality to the perpetuation of this quartet, but we can discuss its consequences. “The original welfare queens were outliers even within the scope of typical welfare fraud cases, the moniker in time worked to suggest that ‘average’ AFDC recipients were lazy, sexually promiscuous (typically African American) women who shirk both domestic and wage labor” (Kohler-Hausmann 2015: 757). Stereotyped characters confirm, cement, and reproduce people’s corresponding prejudices.

The media contributes to discrimination and injustices in allocation of state resources, aid to the poor, reproducing social understandings of deservingness both explicitly and implicitly in coverage and discursive stereotypes that justify their stances—this contributes greatly to the delusions of welfare, that people are not good at seeing their own participation in discriminatory action. Two social changes served as preconditions for the mass racialization – Blackening – of the poor in the media: (1) “widespread migration of rural southern blacks to northern cities” (setting the stage for the hyperghetto) (2) “the changing racial composition of AFDC, the nation’s most conspicuous program to aid the poor” (Gilens 2000: 104-105). “As the real wages of U.S. workers fell, images of lazy welfare recipients provided a scapegoat for economic fears, channeling popular anxieties into anger at government for taxing working families to support the undeserving and irresponsible poor” highjlighting anxieties “surrounding changing gender roles and sexual and familial norms” and programs “equated with poor single mothers of color” (Soss et al. 2009: 11-12). Not all of the welfare state and its stakeholders are obscured with equal shadows of privacy. There must be some bits of the welfare state that aren’t hidden, that which flavors the opinions of policymakers and the public. Media informs prejudice by projecting back and restructuring beliefs and discourse of individuals and within organizations and institutions over time. Americans hate welfare as a means of rewarding the undeserving poor, and “white Americans’ attitudes toward welfare can only be understood in connection with their beliefs about blacks” (Gilens 2000: 3). As stories became more critical of the poor, the poor port rayed in the media colored darker. The tone softens with white poor. Black poor people are overrepresented in the national news media. “A 1994 CBS News/New York Times survey found that respondents who erroneously believed that most welfare recipients were black held consistently more negative views about welfare recipients’ true need and commitment to the work ethic than did respondents who thought most welfare recipients were white” (Gilens 2003: 124). Gilens lays blame at the feet of politicians, that they lack the political muster to address any of this adequately (Gilens 2000: 216). Perhaps too much is stacked against even them.

Allegations of welfare fraud or profligacy are utterly baseless, while responding allegations of racist motivations slip right off. Portraying Black ghetto poverty *as* poverty is factually wrong—“Only 6 percent of all poor Americans are blacks living in urban ghettos” (Gilens 2003: 126). Discrimination, the result of power, is behind the scenes feeding indignation, feeling that the deserving do not get what they deserve, and some of the undeserving do, perhaps matters of group position and/or classification struggle. Purportedly, criminals get away with it, menacing drug dealing, so catch all the drugs you can in the ghetto, because that’s where the criminals are, highlighting every hyperbolic mega-violent example with a sympathetic victim that never deserved it – implicitly establishing there exist deserving victims – supposedly proving your point. But meanwhile, crime is ubiquitous in society. Negative stereotypes applied to a class yields phobia. People internalize hierarchical social structure, and they reproduce it. They also want welfare, they’re even willing to pay higher taxes for it, but they want it for the deserving poor, on this they discriminate (Gilens 2000: 215-216). Not all members of the media wish to perpetuate these stereotypes in their coverage. They really do want to cover the truth, the facts, yet Gilens found they do not, and instead Blacken the face of poverty (Gilens 2003: 126). After all, the media is “in the business of selling news” (125) people pay for news they want to see. This speaks to the difficulty of addressing our prejudices, and in the power exercised by the dominant-class with respect to their prejudices.

People of color and women are treated worse by the welfare state—though it might not touch them, they are castigated as criminals—the carceral state orbits around them. How can you know how to change a thing you can never see? Relationships between prejudice, power, and phobia are not unidirectional (power certainly informs prejudice). My focus on the directionality from prejudice determines power determines discriminatory beliefs about deservingness is because I am interested in how prejudice changes over time, and on the characteristics of successful frameworks. Phobia incorporates power, yet comes as just another prejudice. Those who exercise their phobia are often blissfully unaware of how they yield power, interpersonally and in policy; this has dire consequences for their subjects.[[2]](#footnote-2) Absent mindreading, prejudice is nowhere to be found, but discrimination is rampant within the carceral and welfare states. I argue this is because people are blissfully and painfully unaware of each others’ lived experiences and when/if their lives and communities are reprieved from the matrix of domination. As Wacquant’s “dramaturgy of labor” goes on and moves into typically carceral spaces, the people not policed will remain unaware.

**Part 3: *Discussion***

Piven & Cloward argue that welfare systems exist to structurally regulate poor people, pointing out that the state extends aid only when poor people take to the streets and march, protest, riot, get disorderly, etc. but since writing *Regulating the Poor* there has been what Wacquant calls a “major structural innovation” with unforeseen timing, socioethnic selectivity, and peculiar organizational path that cannot be explained with older theories such as Foucault’s “disciplinary society” or Garland’s “culture of control” (Wacquant 2009: 304) which is to say, the expansion of punitive processes in the welfare state with respect to the matrix of domination. Blumer’s theory of prejudice as group position helps explain social prejudice, but I am interested in discriminatory action; coping with the notion I am not a mind-reader. Sociologists and others argue to consider insecurity and neoliberalism, and the divisive effect they have in American politics and society.

Neoliberalism, and reproducing the matrix of domination arguably caused this shift in society. LeBaron & Roberts call this, “a *crisis in social reproduction,* whereby the ability of individuals and societies to reproduce themselves biologically (which requires adequate nutrition, health care, etc.) and socially (which requires investment in education and training, etc.) has become increasingly difficult” (LeBaron & Roberts 2012: 28). Wacquant and Soss et al. come to similar conclusion—the rise of the masculine neoliberal paradoxical state. The underlying contradiction—small social cooperative governance, except splurging on combating threats to security of conservative and corporate interests. “[N]eoliberalism goes further [than classic Liberalism] by treating market liberties as a model for, and substitute for, political freedoms” (Soss et al. 2009: 2). With ghetto expansion, “(sub)proletarian blacks from the imploding (hyper)ghetto […] pursued with special diligence and severity by the penal state in the wake of the social and racial upheaval of the 1960’s” (Wacquant 2009: 195). 90 percent of welfare recipients are mothers. 93 percent of US inmates are male, Wacquant (2009) theorizes this:

suggests, in line with a rich strand of feminist scholarship on public policy, gender, and citizenship, that the intervention of the double regulation of the poor in America in the closing decades of the twentieth century partakes of an overall (re)masculinizing of the state in the neoliberal age, which may be understood in part as an oblique reaction to (or against) the social changes wrought by the women’s movement and their reverberations inside the bureaucratic field (p. 15)

Responses to the matrix of domination are resisted. Wacquant ties movement of the carceral state to racialization, particularly Blackness, that the carceral state in the United States is a means of racial subjugation over time. Black people are barred from polity and society through criminalization, and this is not new—“The disproportionate impact […] with African Americans comprising a shocking 40% of all persons thus barred from the polls, should come as no surprise, for the long pedigree of these laws ties them intimately to the history of racial domination in the USA” (Wacquant 2005: 132). Studying the rise of incarcerating people for debts “as small as $250”, LeBaron & Roberts identify “a broader trend toward the coercive governance of the social insecurity *generated* by neoliberal social and economic policies” (LeBaron & Roberts 2012: 25-26) [emphasis mine]. Much of the crisis has been contained, they argue, through loans, a device the wealthy can live without, but can be life or death for poor people.

The police and the rest of the carceral state rise to give the illusion of protecting people from their deep-seated notions of insecurity, economic and otherwise while meanwhile disempowering laborers and communities, all by building walls as high and strong as possible. Tactics and strategies have diffused—houses of corrections, in essence, “combine the principles of the poorhouse, workhouse and penal institution.’ Its main aim was ‘to make the labor power of the unwilling people socially useful’ by forcing them to work under close supervision in the hope that, once released, ‘they would voluntarily swell the labor market’” and when legitimacy is questioned, maintain with “intermittent recourse to external force” (Wacquant 2009: 206). A highly combative system towards its subjects, a paternal dialectic of improvement. Under neoliberalism, opinions on deservingness percolate by imposing market-logic to solve social problems. However, it also hives society excluding people from each other’s lived experiences, the economically successful can wholly avoid the unsuccessful. So much talk of building walls, literal and otherwise. Narratives in which the undeserving take what should go elsewhere, to the hardworking and deserving, for example programs that pay for prison inmates to take college classes, tap, “widespread middle-class anxiety over the fast-rising cost of college and the fast-rising cost of college and the increased intensity and unpredictability of educational compettion: the price tag for higher education expressed as a function of the average hourly wage doubled between 1972 and 1992 while the overall number of fellowships declined, not to mention that ‘higher education no longer offers a guarantee of economic security’” (Wacquant 2005: 130). Beyond education and across the economy, “as the real wages of U.S. workers fell, images of lazy welfare recipients provided a scapegoat for economic fears, channeling popular anxieties into anger at government for taxing working families to support the undeserving and irresponsible poor” (Soss et al. 2009: 12).

The application of market logic frames poverty prevention such that poor people seem to need or are lacking in discipline. Changes in poverty governance “can be traced to the same political forces that have worked to deregulate industries, cut government tax revenues, shift risks onto private actors, and weaken social protections for the middle class […] The ambitious schemes that have been applied to the poor reflect broader societal agendas; their political successes are best understood as reflections of larger changes in the organization and mobilization of power within the American polity” (1). Soss et al. describe paternalism as a father-child relationship in which the child “lacks the capacity to know what is in her or his best interest and has yet to develop the self-discipline needed to act effectively on such knowledge” and “the father has a moral obligation to act on this knowledge […] For the child’s own good” the father must deny, impose, and punish. (Soss et al. 2009: 4). Neoliberalism and paternalism “did not cause changes in poverty governance, and they are not faithfully enacted as intellectual scripts today. Rather, as conceptual tools, they help to specify the implicit political logics that guide the exercise of authority. They are the ‘practical rationalities’ that connect seemingly disparate policy activities” (2).

Conservative and corporate causes have aligned, empowering prejudice instilled in both the carceral and welfare states. The rise of the Christian Right, angered by the ban on prayer in public schools and other disagreeable changes such as women’s and gay rights inspired them the time had come “to get in there and fight” aligning with conservative causes wishing “a frontal assault on the activist Keynesian state” such as think tanks and foundations perceiving “moral decline and social disorder” looking for ways to impose order, finding it in building consent for the market from the ground up “to promote an agenda rooted in order, discipline, personal responsibility, and a moral state” and “two segments of the business community: low-wage employers eager to keep labor on the market and firms that stood to profit directly privatization” (Soss et al. 2009: 8-12). Though public opinion did not shift, conservatives prepared for political combat, and they succeeded.

Mead and Wacquant, perhaps on differing ends of political ideology, identify a similar contradiction for conservatives on spending money ostensibly to help the poor. Proponents of paternalism argue it helps poor people *focus* on not being poor, and that establishing obligations for the other party to a contract is an essential element of human freedom—“I’ll give you money if you do *X*, because that makes me feel better about giving you my money, I get something I want in return” contractual logic. Mead writes, “Aid is not given as an entitlement, but in return for good behavior. Neither is all aid denied, as in the traditional antigovernment policy. Paternalism aims to provide the poor with the combination of aid and structure that they seem to need” (Mead 1998: 110). “Rather than denying the citizen’s rights, [paternalism] emphasizes the obligations of citizenship” redefined by constructing entrepreneurial and market logic into the ideals of citizenship “as a justification for enforcing behavioral expectations” (Soss et al. 2009: 5-6). As if mother’s aid with man-in-the-house midnight raids show women with children certainly deserve aid but feeding from two paternal hands, informed by misogynist prejudice, is a clear indicator of loose morals, far-exceeding what one deserves, and we can slip quickly into the carceral. Paternalist tendencies remain. Except by the ‘poor’, at best I argue they wish to help society at the expense of the poor, for such is the ineffectuality and absurdity of current anti-poverty measures, welfare and beyond. Regardless, neoliberalism carries with it an unresolvable contradiction—favoring a small government with limited regulation of the market, but spending big money on a carceral state with mighty powers to control insecurity. The legal arm of the state enforces private corporate interests (LeBaron & Roberts 2012: 27). For Charles Murray, social programs are part of the problem. Gelsthrope criticizes Wacquant, should’ve used more research in confronting him, such as DeFronzo 1997 studying 1980s and 90s that welfare expenditures are associated with less crime, “specifically homicide, rape, and burglary” or Cao, Cao, and Zhao 2004 found that women-headed households do not lead to greater delinquency; “But the argument about welfare dependency has perhaps never really represented an empirical claim so much as a polemic related to welfare reform” (Gelsthorpe 2010: 377).

**Conclusion**

What pulls the carceral and welfare states together? Do these states need to exist together? Where are the members of society not embedded within the carceral or welfare states? They are disconnected, but their opinions are not. People classify each other into two broad categories—deserving of some given resource, and to what degree, and undeserving, and to what degree. It is easy to succumb to the belief our institutions will never be able to free themselves of the matrix of domination. Paternalism in America has a strongly racialized flavor to it. In the carceral state, offenders *deserve* to be punished. In the welfare state, the poor *deserve* assistance. Both are questions of allocating state resources – do you pay for social workers and public libraries, or the police and jails? How much of each and where? Wacquant identifies the carceral and welfare states twisting-movement as “convergence”. For me he evokes imagery of a butterfly and a bird, two creatures that have wings, a phenotype converged from different genetic priors. This makes me believe Wacquant thinks the two states ‘just happened’ to come together under neoliberal social preconditions. I do not wish to argue the precise opposite, that they are deterministically united, but rather to say they are drawn together by personal and institutional opinions with respect to deservingness, which is the result of prejudice and power, and occurs discriminatorily with respect to the matrix of domination.

Everyone is prejudiced. We need prejudice to get through our day, to know that one should not step in front of a moving car is a kind of assuming without knowing the future of the oncoming vehicle. It is fundamentally difficult to control a process we cannot see, that conscientious effort is bound to collide with subconscious resistance; just as organizational resistance to the matrix of domination legitimizes and energizes its ‘traditionalist’ opponents. Jurisprudence of colorblindness and impartiality, zero tolerance, and other forms of stripping away social conditions from individuals’ and institutional narratives hobbles the big picture. They must be actively fought, but the people who carry them can never be discarded. If that happens, you have lost them, their prejudice will remain locked beyond the mightiest salesman for a society reprieved from the matrix of domination.

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1. I am write to write that poor people are treated like *criminals* by the state, because this process has gone on for so long in these policed spaces, the word “criminal” is your father or your brother or your aunt—it has lost much of its pejorative connotation to subjugated communities, yet retained all of its sadness. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Perhaps it also carries consequences for the dominant class, it seems unreasonable to think it wouldn’t. Segregation by class gives rise to more inequality and insensitivity. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)