

The Cultural Work of Decommissioned Carceral Sites: Representations of Confinement and Punishment at Kingston Penitentiary

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[Figure 23, p 137]

On 19 April 2012, the Government of Canada announced plans to shut down Kingston Penitentiary (KP), a maximum-security prison located in Kingston, Ontario. In operation since 1835, KP was the country's most notorious prison, incarcerating individuals perceived to pose the greatest danger to society before and after Confederation in 1867. This news shocked many, including the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers. Hundreds of workers and members of the public protested in front of KP. Many people felt the closure would cripple the local economy. Workers for KP were upset as plans had yet to be made for their relocation. Others, particularly abolitionists, were pleased to see the closure of KP. Although, as noted in a zine by End the Prison Industrial Complex, this development "is not a victory for abolitionists," particularly given that this period "is a time marked by massive prison expansion across this stolen land."¹ By 30 September 2013, all prisoners had been transferred to other facilities.

KP is located on the waterfront of Lake Ontario, minutes away from downtown Kingston. Soon after the announcement of the closure, debates commenced about the site's future. Complicating matters is the penitentiary's status as a National Historic Site of Canada, designated in 1990. Many of the original buildings cannot be demolished. One popular idea among developers was to turn the site into a world-class sailing facility. Another popular option involved transforming KP into a dark tourism site dubbed "Alcatraz North,"² which would re-open the doors of the facility to the public; this was the case from the years following its construction to the early 1900s, until officials came to view these visitations as a distraction from its operation. Many decommissioned carceral institutions have been turned into penal history museums, such as the Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia. We use the term "carceral retasking" to refer to the act of turning a decommissioned penitentiary, prison,

¹ End the Prison Industrial Complex (EPIC), Closure Is Not Abolition: Perspectives on the Closing of Kingston Penitentiary (Kingston, 2013), 1. Also see, Justin Piché, "Accessing the State of Imprisonment in Canada: Information Barriers and Negotiation Strategies," in Brokering Access: Politics, Power, and Freedom of Information in Canada, ed. M. Larsen and K. Walby (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 234–260.

² Carys Mills, "Shutdown of Kingston Pen Clears Path for Alcatraz North," The Globe and Mail, April 22, 2012, www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/shutdown-of-kingston-pen-clears-path-for-alcatraz-north/article4101874.

jail, or lock-up into another enterprise that continues to reproduce imprisonment as a dominant idea and/or material practice.

Following the closure of KP, tours were organized by the United Way of Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox & Addington (UWKFLA) and Habitat for Humanity Kingston & Frontenac (HFHKP) in October and November 2013 with the permission of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC). This development is symptomatic of the close relationship between non-profit organizations and the state, with the former often buttressing the repressive policies and practices of the latter, either materially or ideologically. In the case of KP, this relationship manifests itself with non-profits generating funds for the activities of their organizations by collaborating with state actors (e.g. CSC staff serving as volunteer guides) to put on tours of the decommissioned penitentiary that briefly expose tourists to the “realities” of incarceration—albeit largely from CSC’s vantage point.

Tours of defunct carceral facilities have been described as a form of dark tourism where visitors encounter representations of death and disaster for education or entertainment purposes. To date, there has been a lack of studies examining cultural representations of imprisonment and dark tourism at decommissioned carceral sites in Canada, of which there are more than 50 across the country that our research team has visited. There has also been a lack of research examining the motives and experiences of penal tourists. This study examines visitors’ motives for participating in the tours of KP, the representations of confinement and punishment communicated during the tours, as well as how individuals share their tour experiences.

Prospective penal tourists were encouraged to take tours of KP to gain access to a previously inaccessible space for a limited time only and to get an authentic look into prison life. Themes emerging from the first public tours of KP included the extraordinary aspects of prison life, such as prisoner violence, security, the use of force, and escapes. Tourist reactions after the tour were appreciative, focusing on the performance of tour guides and their own personal enjoyment, while critical reflections on the harms of incarceration were rare. According to criminologist Michelle Brown, the majority of information about prison is communicated to the public through cultural representations such as television shows,

movies, and prison tours. The social distance of those members of the public who are not directly involved in or affected by institutionalized punishment thus creates “penal spectators,”³ a position that may increase and normalize sentiments towards punishment. This distancing also allows most people to ignore any responsibility they have toward penal practices.⁴ In this way, such tours increase the social distance between the general public and the lived realities of incarceration in Canada.

While abolitionists direct much effort toward developing strategies to shut down spaces of confinement and punishment, our analysis of narratives stemming from the carceral retasking underway at KP shows that even when carceral sites are shut down, they continue to perform cultural work that reproduces the idea that imprisonment is a necessary state practice. Following a review of relevant literature, the presentation of our findings, and contributions to debates on dark tourism and penal tourism, we conclude by reflecting upon the challenges that this phenomenon poses to abolitionists working to resist state repression.

[Figure 24, p 137]

Dark Tourism and Penal History Museums

Research on dark tourism and penal history museums has focused on the meanings of penalty and prison life communicated through narratives presented to tourists. Many studies have examined cultural representations that are part of tours at decommissioned carceral institutions, using case studies such as Alcatraz and Robben Island, South Africa. Criminologists Carolyn Strange and Michael Kempa claim the narratives of imprisonment at Alcatraz have been shaped by external group pressures, visitor interests, and managerial actions. Similarly, Jacqueline Wilson has found that organizers at the HM Pentridge Prison tour in Australia communicated punitive and sensational narratives for the purposes of entertaining guests.⁵

There has also been a lack of literature examining the desire of people to participate in penal tours. Researchers Nancy Phaswana-Mafuya and Norbert Haydam conducted surveys of visitors

3
Michelle Brown, The Culture of Punishment: Prison, Society, and Spectacle, (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 8.

4
Ibid., 11.

5
Jacqueline Wilson, “Dark Tourism and the Celebrity Prisoner: Front and Back Regions in Representations of an Australian Historical Prison,” Journal of Australian Studies 28, no. 82 (2009): 1–13.

before and after their tour of the Robben Island museum, finding tourist expectations (e.g. information on Nelson Mandela's cell, history of the museum) were generally met by the facilities and services offered.—⁶ Apart from Strange and Kempa, who used tourist surveys and interviews with prison staff to discover why people visit Alcatraz and Robben Island, tourist motives for visiting the penal history sites are understudied.

Contemporary research on individual reactions to carceral tours is also scarce. Some researchers, including Mickey Dewar and Clayton Frederickson, who conducted a study at Fannie Bay Gaol in Australia, have analyzed comment cards to study public reactions following such tours.—⁷ They uncovered themes of punitiveness, sympathy, and tour dissatisfaction. No studies have analyzed how visitors share their encounters with carceral experiences after tours, particularly through social media, which is now a key forum for communication that influences the way people think about issues. It is sometimes referred to as "electronic word of mouth," or eWOM, and platforms such as Twitter and Facebook serve as vectors for transferring emotions. Below, in addition to studying the narratives communicated to penal spectators during tours of KP, we examine how tourists share their expectations of, and reactions to, penal tourism through social media.

Penal Spectatorship and Kingston Prison

To examine the meanings of confinement and punishment communicated during these visits, our research team recorded audio, took photos, and wrote field notes based on our participation in a tour of Kingston Prison organized by the UWKFLA and another coordinated by HFHKF. To analyze the motives and reactions of participants, we also collected and analyzed online comments posted in response to news outlet stories (e.g. CBC News, CTV News, Global News, The Globe and Mail, Huffington Post, The National Post, The Ottawa Sun, The Toronto Star, and The Kingston Whig-Standard), as well as comments on Facebook and Twitter that included hashtags such as #kingstonpenitentiary, #kingstonpen, #kptour, and #kingstonpentour. We protect the anonymity and confidentiality of

tour guides and visitors by not using their names or pictures where they could be identified. The identities of online commenters, which are often linked to their social media profiles, are also concealed to protect their privacy—with the exception of posts published by the UWKFLA, HFHKF, and journalists.

Tourist Motives

[Figure 25, p 137]

There were three primary motives for participating in KP tours expressed in news articles and related reader comments, as well as social media posts. First, KP was presented as a forbidden space that would be appealing to gain access to. Many articles, comments, and posts presented the KP tours as an opportunity to gain insider access to an ordinarily inaccessible area. Global National's tweet described the tours as offering the chance for an “exclusive look at Kingston Penitentiary,” while a news anchor from a radio station called it “a rare look inside.” HFHKF enticed volunteers for the tours by tweeting that they could “get behind the scenes” and would be “first in line to see the site.” Many articles described the tours as an unrestricted look “behind the storied walls.”⁸

The second motive for taking tours of KP expressed in news and social media comments was to gain an authentic look at prison life. It was suggested that tourists would get a “glimpse into life behind the prison’s historic walls,” in “one of the oldest prisons in continuous use in the world.”⁹ The news media also promoted the authenticity of the facility by focusing on the people that were held in KP. One article describes “eager customers beginning an online bidding war for the chance to have a look inside the maximum security prison where some of Canada’s most notorious criminals served their time.”¹⁰

The time-sensitive nature within which these first tours were offered also served as motivation for touring KP. The tours were described as a “one time only”¹¹ or “limited time” opportunity.¹² The most prominent theme among the Facebook posts and tweets was demand for tickets. The popularity of the tours was undeniable

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Harvey
Kirkpatrick,
“Selling Out:
Kingston
Pen Tours,”
Kingstonist,
November 6, 2013,
www.kingstonist.com/2013/11/06/kingston-penitentiary-tour-tickets-24807.

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Erika Tucker,
“Inside Kingston
Penitentiary: Tours
Sold Out within
Hours,” Global
News, October 2,
2013, globalnews.ca/news/877576/inside-kingston-penitentiary-tours-sold-out-within-hours.

10
Nicholas Hune-
Brown, “Kingston
Penitentiary’s
Brutal Legacy,”
October 7, 2013,
The Toronto Star,
www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2013/10/07/kingston-penitentiarys-brutal_legacy.html.

11
Kirkpatrick,
“Selling Out.”

12
Tucker, “Inside
Kingston
Penitentiary.”

in the pages of posts inquiring about where and how to buy tickets. Potential tourists expressed interest and attended the tours from "as far away as British Columbia and Nova Scotia."¹³ One Facebook user posted: "I am from a few hours away and would make the trip to go and visit," while a news article commenter said that she "would fly from Alberta to Kingston just to see it."¹⁴

Disappointment, frustration, and outrage were also expressed through article comments, Facebook posts, and tweets when many of those interested in touring KP were unable to obtain tickets, which had quickly sold-out. One Facebook user noted, "I have been trying to get tickets to the tour to Kingston Pen since 6am this morning... I didn't get tickets and I am really disappointed." Another post on Facebook stated, "Ridiculous... not even 2 min after sales and can not even get 1 ticket."

When tickets could no longer be obtained through the brokers that worked with the charities operating the KP tours, people turned to Kijiji and EBay, where they could be purchased at up to four times their face value, which one online column contributor noted was "more than what you'd pay to go (to) an average NHL game."¹⁵ Others who "couldn't get tickets" decided "to volunteer" their time for one of the charities running the tour so that they could still get the KP experience. Article comments, tweets, and Facebook posts flooded the Internet demanding more tours be organized, culminating in the creation of a petition demanding that CSC allow for more tours. The initial enthusiasm for the KP tours and the disappointment conveyed by those who could not take part reveals the Canadian appetite for penal and dark tourism. The interest in gaining "authentic" experiences of prison life, a central theme in news coverage and online comments we examined, appears to be an important driver of this kind of voyeuristic tourism.

Jacqueline Wilson describes a similar situation that emerged when an Australian prison closed and members of the public wanted to tour the decommissioned facility because they were captivated by the idea of having an "authentic" prison experience.¹⁶ Regina Bendix describes a tourist desire to "collect" new experiences and the pressure on tourist sites to offer these.¹⁷ The presentation of the KP tours as exclusive, authentic, and limited may have aroused

prospective visitors' desire for new experiences. Phaswana-Mafuya and Haydam highlight the way in which sites must accommodate the demands of tourists.⁻¹⁸ Interest in KP as a spectacle supports this trend. As is shown below, tour guides often tailored the narratives to accommodate tourists' demands, purposely focusing on exciting aspects of KP and avoiding features that could foster a critical engagement vis-à-vis penalty.

18
Nancy Phaswana-
Mafuya and
Norbert Haydam,
"Tourists'
Expectations and
Perceptions of the
Robben Island
Museum—A World
Heritage Site,"
149–169.

Taking Tours of Kingston Prison

[Figure 26, p 138]

Prisoner violence, security, the use of force, and notable prisoners were the dominant themes consistently present during the tours. The tour organized by the UWKFLA that our research team participated in was guided by a former employee at KP (Tour Guide A), like the tour organized by HFHKF, which was also run by a former staff member at the facility (Tour Guide B). A third volunteer, not affiliated with CSC (Tour Guide C), tended to rely on the pre-made tour script produced by the federal agency, more so than the former employees, who largely focused on anecdotes they had come up with from working at KP. Although the volunteer guide officially ran the HFHKF tour, it was the former staffer who took the lead, captivating people with his behind-the-scenes stories. Often, the volunteer guide would look to the former employee for clarification on information or interesting stories about a section of the facility. She would also refer to the former KP worker's expertise by saying things like, "where is the parole office?" and "how often did they come to the gym?"

[Figure 27, p 138]

Violence among prisoners was presented as a normal aspect of prison life. For example, Tour Guide A included a story about a prisoner being killed over a cigarette that he owed. He also mentioned that grates were installed on the upper tiers of the main dome because prisoners threw each other over the railings. Tour Guide B also recounted violence at KP, including a story about a

murder in which a prisoner was stabbed repeatedly in the chest. He also described how “an inmate took one of the weight bars, struck another inmate in the head, cracking his head like an egg, killing him instantly.” Tour Guide A claimed that six prisoners had died during his years working at KP, which he felt was “not enough.” Both tours described violence in the kitchen and at mealtimes, resulting in the closure of the cafeteria.

[Figure 28, p 138]

Prisoners were depicted as constant security threats, requiring the newest technology to control them. All tour guides referred to the prisoners as “punks,” “inmates,” “murderers,” and “animals” who merited the institutional security and maintenance practices they were subjected to. For example, in the workshop dome, Tour Guide C pointed out that “on the floor there’s like a yellow passage. That’s where they were allowed to walk and there is a set of painted footprints, they would have to stand there to be searched, before they came in and came out.” Security and “good order” were the basis for allowing prisoners to gain access to privileges such as the Personal Family Visitation Units, with Tour Guide B remarking, “You had to have zero institutional charges, no fights at all like in the last year or so, not just in the last week or so.”

[Figure 29, p 138]

Tour guides also emphasized the need for security with regards to those who would visit prisoners. During our tour on 2 November 2013, a volunteer guiding another group passing by noted, “if you are a visitor, you would stand on the footprints. And then what they would do is they would have a drug dog go up and down and they would be checking you for contraband... if the drug dog stopped in front of you, you had the option to be searched, or you had the option to leave.” Any staff member who had “reasonable” grounds to suspect that a visitor had contraband who opted not to leave when they were approached could be frisked, detained, and strip-searched.

[Figure 30, p 139]

As tourists made their way through the grounds, guides would highlight the security measures in each cellblock, including the location of the officer control post and the automatic door-locking system. All guides pointed out that the minimum number of armed guards needed in the main dome at all times was fifteen and specified which guards carried weapons. Each tour went into detail about voice-recording and camera-monitoring systems in the visiting area, as well as giving insight into prisoner counts, the necessity of prisoner searches, and communication between prison staff. On this topic, Tour Guide B frequently stated: “In corrections we are not proactive in stopping violence, we are reactive.” In his view, changes to prison security devices or procedures would only take place in response to a problematic event. For example, the tour guide reiterated, “we’re reactive in the service, not proactive. After the attempted escape” when a prisoner accessed the roof, “they put razor wire” in that area.

[Figure 31, p 139]

The guides all deemed the use of force against prisoners necessary, due to the supposedly violent nature of prisoners and the gaps in KP’s security system. Guides focused on equipment such as flash-bang grenades, gas delivery systems, firearms, and pepper spray. Tourists learned about circumstances where officers had the authority to kill prisoners. On this topic, Tour Guide B remarked: “The criminal code covers any correctional officer who shoots an inmate, within reason. Inmates going over the wall—when would you shoot them? Halfway up the wall because nobody accidentally climbs a rope in a maximum-security prison without the idea of escaping.” The same guide stated that they would try to kill the winner of fights between prisoners saying, “we don’t shoot to injure, we shoot to stop.”

[Figure 32, p 139]

A central component of the tour experience was stories of extraordinary prisoners such as Paul Bernardo and Russell Williams,

both high-profile serial killers, as well as exceptionally violent events at KP, like prisoner murders. Such stories were often sparked by tourist responses to the guides' narratives. For example, one participant on the 2 November 2013 tour asked, "Are we going to talk about some of the infamous (prisoners)... we watched the Russell Williams documentary yesterday... we were getting excited." Illustrating the low regard with which the incarcerated are often held, tourists acted disgusted when tour guides pointed to the double cells that warehoused some infamous protective-custody prisoners who spent most of their time within these spaces. Tourists frequently requested information about conditions of confinement, but were often dissatisfied with responses depicting compassion for prisoners. In one situation, Tour Guide A pointed out that despite the fact that KP sits on the waterfront, Lake Ontario could not be seen from inside the prison. This statement was met with negative reactions, including one tourist who said "I don't feel bad for them."

[Figure 33, p 140]

Depictions of notable events also contributed to the animosity directed toward KP prisoners. Among them was the focus on the 1971 prison riot, which Tour Guide C rightfully described as a "very violent (...) episode" in which "the inmates decided to take the guys that were in protective custody, which were sex offenders, informants, that type of clientele, and have a kangaroo trial here. Two inmates died, one here and one at the hospital." The tours also emphasized the damage caused by prisoners during the incident, which involved military intervention, and how security and prison standards were tightened afterwards. The broader context of state repression and the absence of human rights for those under the control of the federal penitentiary system that triggered the violence were not discussed.

[Figure 34, p 140]

Prisoners were also presented as a constant risk for escape during the tours. Scheming escape plans that included leaving

dummies in their beds and replacing bars with wooden dowels were shared with visitors. Often the groups would laugh at the extent prisoners would go to for freedom. Two recurring examples included one prisoner lassoing the guard tower pulley from the roof of the gym to scale the outer wall and Ty Conn's escape attempt, both portrayed as failures of prison staff to prevent these incidents. When pointing to the area of the wall where Ty Conn's escape took place, Tour Guide B explained, "Afterwards (...) they put the fence up, and put the razor wire." Turning his attention to the nearest guard tower he noted that it was unmanned when the escape occurred, which was remedied thereafter.

The themes of prisoner violence, institutional security, use of force, and notable prisoners and events were a product both of tour guide narratives and interactions with tourists when questions were raised. Themes like program participation, education, and religious observance among prisoners, which could contribute to their humanization, were not addressed in any depth. As well, themes like sexual assault, mental health issues, and suicide that could paint CSC, its staff, and incarceration in a generally negative light were omitted. Wilson problematizes the use of prison staff as tour guides, suggesting that it perpetuates the "othering" of prisoners.⁻¹⁹ Brown notes that penal tourism excursions foster distance between spectators and the realities of imprisonment in ways that allow punishment to remain largely unproblematized.⁻²⁰ Both phenomena were apparent during our tours, as former KP staff referred to prisoners using degrading language that removed any connection between the public and the incarcerated, absolving people of any remorse they may feel for caging fellow human beings.

Tours are also products of the engagement and interaction of tour group members.⁻²¹ Due to the largely unscripted nature of the KP tour, the punitive views among guests influenced the tour by helping to nudge the tour guide toward certain topics. For example, tourists consistently inquired about infamous prisoners and their living conditions, and research on penal tourism at Alcatraz has shown that tourists' interests can alter the narrative of the official script.⁻²² Regardless of what the pre-made script about KP stated, tour guide anecdotes and tourist interests influenced the narrative focus of the

19
Jacqueline Wilson, "Australian Prison Tourism: A Question of Narrative Integrity," History Compass 9, no. 8 (2011): 562–571.

20
Brown, The Culture of Punishment, 8.

21
Katie Best, "Making Museum Tours Better: Understanding What a Guided Tour Really Is and What a Tour Guide Really Does," Museum Management and Curatorship, 27, no. 1 (2012): 35–52.

22
Carolyn Strange and Michael Kempa, "Shades of Dark Tourism," Annals of Tourism Research 30, no. 2 (2003): 386–405.

tours toward the more spectacular aspects of incarceration.

Tourists' impressions that they have been exposed to authentic prison life are erroneous. Lennon and Foley describe how, despite educational goals, a dark tourism site can prove to be a form of entertainment, focused mainly on winning the attention of visitors as opposed to critically examining an issue.^{–23} During the tours of KP, visitors were made to feel they were witnessing raw reality, but in fact were provided with a sensational portrayal of the prison that failed to address some of the more mundane or routine aspects of incarceration. More specifically, the tours glossed over the everyday pains of imprisonment, such as the deprivation of liberty, goods and services, desired sexual relationships, autonomy, and security. Although the tour was presented as an authentic look at KP, the selected route (which was the same in both tours) and the exclusion of certain areas indicates that only specific areas were accessed. The groups were brought to the cleaner sections of the penitentiary with less graffiti and were unable to enter areas like the hospital for "sanitary reasons," further limiting their already fleeting encounter with imprisonment.

The way that KP is represented to tourists serves to distance them from the reality of the many operational penitentiaries mere kilometres away. Shearing and Kempa explain the importance of alternative perspectives in the engagement of visitors.^{–24} Indeed, the KP tours lacked alternative perspectives, particularly by excluding the narratives of prisoners. This setup encouraged tourists to take a less active role as they simply viewed these scenes of incarceration devoid of prisoners and their voices, thus avoiding the potential of being called-out for being among the authors of the punishment inflicted upon them in Canada.

Tourists on their KP Experience

[Figure 35–36, p 140]

Generally, penal spectators cherished their brief encounter with KP, with many sharing their opinions through short statements on Facebook and Twitter. Posts such as "tour was amazing..."

would go again” and “the tour of Kingston Penitentiary (sic) ... was brilliant!” were common. The general experiences among news commentators tended to be similar to the social media postings. As one community editorial member wrote: “Kingston Pen. First tour. First Day (sic). I was impressed. Would I go back? Yes. Would I pay money to go back? Yes. Would I encourage everyone in the area and every tourist to go on the tour? Yes.”²⁵ With similar enthusiasm, a reader commenting on a news article in *The Kingston Whig-Standard* by Elliot Ferguson stated: “What a terrific experience with plenty of stories to hear about. Given me the appetite to visit Alcatraz.”²⁶

Tour reactions in newspaper articles focused more on the mood of the tour and how this impacted the tour experience. This is evident in the headlines of articles, including “Kingston Pen—A Sobering Tour”²⁷ and “Kingston Penitentiary Leaves Visitor ‘chilled.’”²⁸ Only a handful of comments had a critical tone. For example, one tourist interviewed on CTV News remarked, “When you think of all of the suffering by the inmates plus their victims, it’s just emotional... Anybody thinking of doing anything bad and ending up in something like that, I don’t know how they would live in there.”²⁹

Tourists who commented online often talked about their specific tour guide positively and focused on the interesting perspectives that he or she had to offer. A common occurrence was social media users who toured KP mentioning the stories being communicated by their guides: “Kingston pen tour was a must see! no better tour guide than our fam(ily) friend who’s been a KP guard! lots of history, unfiltered pen stories!” While the majority of users reacted favourably toward the tour and the stories being told by the guides, one user expressed frustration: “(I)t has come to my attention that others have received much more detailed tours than the one we received. (...) The tour guide they had was a pen guard, the one we had was a volunteer. I realize that a volunteer would not have the same knowledge as a CSC employee, however receiving the same tour would be beneficial.” Yet, most social media users were fascinated with the personal experience of their guide and their role in the facility. Guides were mentioned by name and many times the comments would specify the previous role of the tour guide at the prison. One Facebook comment noted: “We thoroughly enjoyed our

25
Edward O’Brien,
“Penitentiary Tour
an Eye-opening
Experience,”
*The Kingston
Whig-Standard*,
October 4, 2013,
[www.thewhig.
com/2013/10/04/
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“Inside the Walls
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Joe Tersigni,
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Colin Perkel,
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How They
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tour. Our tour guide was a parole officer... she was fantastic." Unlike Strange and Kempa's study, which found visitor reactions at Robben Island tended to consist of sadness and admiration for prisoners, KP tour reactions display much less empathetic responses.

According to Claudia Bell, these results should not be surprising, for these practices merely offer the tourist a passive glimpse into an unfamiliar world, rather than create an "active cultural critic."³⁰ While tourism itself does not intrinsically provide a critical medium for fostering activism, the tourist experience does have the potential to alter personal beliefs on punishment; tours can indeed alter how we see ourselves in relation to others.³¹ However, tourist experiences at KP demonstrate that people may not critically analyze their own experience, as their reactions were more concerned with the performance of the tour guide than the realities of incarceration.

Finally, scholars have noted the power of electronic word of mouth to influence personal opinions and behaviours.³² eWOM refers to any statement about products or services made through social media types available to a wide range of people via the Internet (e.g. online reviews, Twitter feedback). Emerging research has shown the effect eWOM has on individuals, and that it is able to alter public attitudes.³³ What people were communicating online and through newspapers about the KP tours reached a wide readership, helping shape public views of prison life and prisoners themselves. Reactions reflected positive personal experiences, and the performance of the tour guides created more dialogue, but again not on the conditions of imprisonment in a way that would raise questions about the quantity and quality of punishment meted-out to prisoners in Canada.

Abolitionism and the Challenges of Penal Tourism

Contributing to penal and dark tourism literatures, we have shown how members of the press and the general public expected to gain a rare opportunity to get an authentic impression of what KP was like. The tours were sensationalized in promotional materials and news coverage, generating significant demand for tickets. We also explored the representations of imprisonment communicated during the tours of KP that our research team took part in. Prisoners were

described as security threats that required continuous surveillance to prevent violence and escape. The use of force was represented as absolutely necessary to control prisoners. The tour experience featured stories of notable prisoners and exceptional events, fuelled by the anecdotes of tour guides, many of whom previously worked as staff at the facility. Most KP tourists tended to show little compassion for prisoners, and expressed punitive beliefs in their questions and responses.

The reactions to the tours communicated in news articles and online media also reveal a distance between the authors and the recipients of punishment, as most seemed more preoccupied with their tour experience than with the broader issues associated with the deprivation of liberty. The fixation on tour performances masks the realities of incarceration for tourists at the site, as well as any individual who reads about the tours of KP in news and social media.

KP no longer warehouses prisoners as part of the Canadian carceral state that buttresses colonial rule, sustains capitalist domination, and perpetuates inequality through racist, patriarchal, heteronormative, and other discriminatory practices. However, this does not mean that this decommissioned carceral site ceases to perform cultural work that reproduces the notion that incarceration is a necessary part of contemporary life. As is clear in examining the narratives of penal spectators and tour guides about their encounters with KP, the main message that comes across is that imprisonment offers protection from prisoners, who are largely depicted as dangerous.

As a result, penal tourism sites are important milieus of contestation that abolitionists should engage with to challenge dominant meanings associated with confinement and punishment. While one answer would be to work toward abolishing the kind of cultural production examined here, such a course of action has drawbacks—state repression should be memorialized, not forgotten. However, this memorialization needs to be informed by abolitionist work that privileges accounts “from below”—³⁴ to bridge the distance between authors and survivors of incarceration. Penal spectators need to be confronted with the violence that has and continues to be perpetrated in their names.

We encourage abolitionists to engage paid and unpaid staff at the many penal history museums dotting Canada's carceral landscape that disseminate cultural representations of imprisonment, and to cultivate opportunities to present alternative histories. Where KP is concerned, abolitionist interventions need to be oriented toward making room for critiques to be advanced as part of the stories that are told about the past, present, and future of imprisonment. Failing to do so will leave the punitive meanings of incarceration uncontested, condemning future generations to a damaging penal status quo.

Acknowledgements

This research is part of the Carceral Cultures Research Initiative (www.carceralcultures.ca) and is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (grant number 430-2012-0447).



Figure 23: Photo of King Street in Kingston, Ontario after the closure of KP.



Figure 24: Photo of a short rope strapped to the bars of a segregation cell window at KP that could be viewed during tours held in the Fall of 2013.

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Special Tours to provide a glimpse behind Kingston Penitentiary walls

SEPTEMBER 19, 2013 BY [UNITEDWAY](#)

News Release

Special Tours to provide a glimpse behind Kingston Penitentiary walls

KINGSTON, ONT. / September 19, 2013 – The public will be offered a unique opportunity to tour the Kingston Penitentiary before it is decommissioned.

The tours will take place October 2 to October 20, Wednesdays to Sundays inclusive, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. They will take approximately 1 1/2 hours and will provide a glimpse into life behind the prison's historic walls. Volunteers from Correctional Services Canada will guide the tour, and community volunteers will be on hand as well.

Proceeds from these tours will go to the local United Way. The tour concludes at the Penitentiary Museum. Participants will get the chance to pick up souvenirs with all proceeds from the gift shop going to the museum.

"While we are saddened by the closing of this historic institution, we very much appreciate the opportunity to provide local residents with public tours of the oldest penitentiary in Canada," says Bhavana Varna, President & CEO of United Way of KFL&A.

The Kingston Penitentiary officially opened on June 1, 1835 as the "Provincial Penitentiary of the Province of Upper Canada." Before the announcement of its closure, it was one of the oldest prisons in continuous use in the world. In 1990, Kingston Penitentiary was designated a National Historic Site of Canada.

"The United Way and Kingston Penitentiary have been important to the Kingston Community for generations," says Lori MacDonald, Campaign Chair of United Way of KFL&A. "These tours present an unprecedented opportunity for Canadians to learn about Kingston Penitentiary and public safety. At the same time, visitors will be supporting those in need in the Kingston area."

More information about the tour and about Kingston Penitentiary can be found on the United Way website, www.unitedwaykfla.ca/kp-tours.

Tickets for the tours will be available through the United Way website, www.unitedwaykfla.ca/kp-tours beginning Friday, September 20, 2013.

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Figure 25: UWKFLA press releasing announcing tours of KP.

Incarceration



Figure 26: Photo of the north gate of KP as viewed from the courtyard.

Scapegoat 7



Figure 27: Photo of a Personal Family Visitation Unit at KP.KP as viewed from the courtyard.

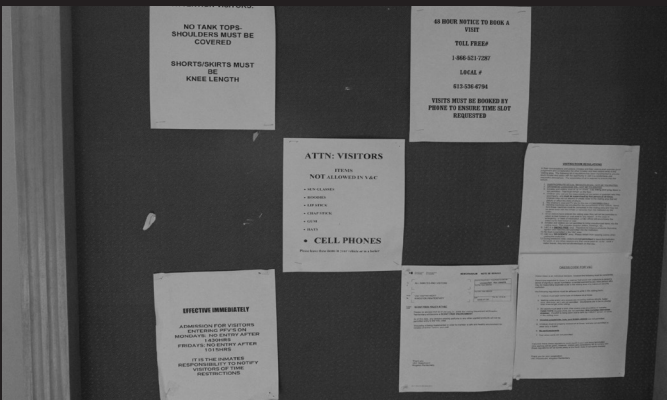


Figure 28: Photo of a bulletin board featuring numerous regulations governing the conduct of prisoners and visitors in the visitation areas at KP.



Figure 29: Photo of the central dome at KP.



Figure 30: Photo of a cellblock at KP.



Figure 31: Photo of the northwest guard tower at KP.



Figure 32: Photo of a cell at KP with a mock prisoner.

Incarceration



Figure 33: Photo of the outside of the central dome that was the focal point of the 1971 riot at KP.

Scapegoat 7



Figure 34: Photo of the shop at KP were Ty Conn hid prior to his escape.

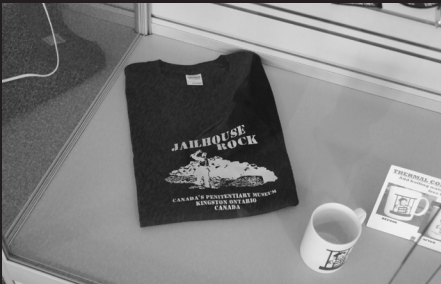


Figure 35



Figure 36: Photos of some of the items penal spectators could purchase at the Federal Penitentiary Museum to remember their brief encounter with incarceration.