

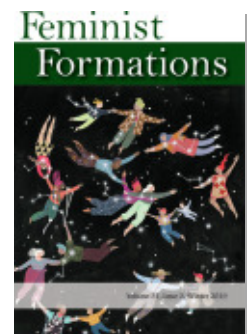


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All Our Trials: Prisons, Policing, and the Feminist Fight to End Violence by Emily L. Thuma (review)

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BOOK REVIEWS

All Our Trials: Prisons, Policing, and the Feminist Fight to End Violence by Emily L. Thuma. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019, 226 pp., \$24.95 paper.

Priya Kandaswamy

Emily Thuma's *All Our Trials: Prisons, Policing, and the Feminist Fight to End Violence* is a meticulously researched intervention into histories of feminist antiviolence activism. *All Our Trials* builds on and extends critiques of carceral feminism by examining feminist organizing during the 1970s and 1980s that linked ending violence against women to opposition to the criminal justice system. Thuma analyzes a broad range of activist approaches including prisoner defense campaigns, efforts to curtail the expansion of women's prisons, prison newsletters, and coalitions that developed intersectional approaches to addressing violence. Focusing both on national and local level organizing and highlighting organizations that were often on the periphery of more mainstream second-wave feminism, Thuma's research both denaturalizes the idea that the criminal justice system can be a vehicle for addressing violence against women while simultaneously providing models for a different approach. In doing so, she also locates the organizations she describes as important sites for the development of abolitionist thought, thereby making visible historical connections between feminism and prison abolition that have often been ignored.

All Our Trials joins a growing body of scholarship that documents and critiques the carceral turn in feminist antiviolence activism. Largely indebted to women of color feminisms, this work has shown how efforts to criminalize violence against women functioned to shore up an expanding prison system while neglecting the root causes of violence. Thuma's research elaborates this critique, constructing "an alternative history of feminism and the carceral state by shifting the focus to spaces and places at the edges of the mainstream antiviolence movement" (7). By engaging with these spaces, Thuma shows how carceral feminism was always contested and makes visible a longer history of feminist organizing that identified prisons as a site of gendered violence. In this way, she troubles narrow definitions of antiviolence activism while challenging many assumptions about the character and scope of feminist organizing in the 1970s and 1980s. With the organizations she chooses, Thuma productively disrupts dominant representations of second-wave feminism as exclusively led

by white, upper-class, cisgender, straight women. She highlights the work of multiracial and cross-class coalitions, the influence of Black feminism, the leadership of lesbian and queer women, and a commitment to trans-inclusive feminist organizing as central to the development of anticarceral feminism.

All Our Trials offers much more than a corrective to histories of second-wave feminism. Rather, the book posits a different way of approaching feminist social movement histories. Methodologically, Thuma eschews linear narratives in favor of deep engagement with the debates, conflicts, and challenges that antiviolence activists faced in their encounters with the carceral state. Thuma treats movements as sites of theorizing, and her analysis shows how an intersectional understanding of violence against women emerged from on the ground organizing. Not only does she engage with organizations that often get left out of feminist histories, the book is interested in process, not just in outcomes. The history presented in *All Our Trials* shows how organizations developed, what people struggled with, and the way encounters with the carceral state shaped thinking about and responses to violence against women. In this way, the book both pushes the reader to grapple with the broad range of feminist futures that were being imagined at the time while also being an instructive text for social movements of the present.

The book begins with an analysis of the defense campaigns of Joan Little, Inez García, Yvonne Wanrow, and Dessie Woods, four women who were incarcerated for defending themselves against sexual violence. Perhaps the most well-known of the cases, Joan Little was sexually assaulted by a prison guard while incarcerated in North Carolina. After stabbing and killing the guard in self-defense, she fled the prison. Eventually Little turned herself in and stood trial for the guard's murder, sparking a national campaign to free her. Thuma shows how this campaign connected feminist antiviolence activism, the Black Power movement, and antiprison activists. Linking Little's defense to the defense campaigns of other Black political prisoners of the time, Thuma notes that the Free Joan Little campaign expanded the definition of who constituted a political prisoner. Little's case proved a sharp challenge to universalizing theories of rape as a gendered exercise of power in that it drew attention to the role racialized state violence played in sexual violence against Black women. While Little's case literally illustrated how the prison was a source of violence against women, Inez García, Dessie Woods, and Yvonne Wanrow were all women of color who were incarcerated for defending themselves against sexual violence outside of prison. However, defense campaigns still emphasized the role the criminal justice system played in sanctioning violence and criminalizing self-defense. Activists connected the four cases to each other and in doing so demonstrated that "the common bond shared by these four defendants was their victimization by, and resistance to a colonialist, capitalist, racial state that condones sexual violence as a tool of suppressing U.S. Third World women" (40).

Coalitional work figures centrally in Thuma's analysis. For example, in chapter 2, "Diagnosing Institutional Violence: Forging Alliances against the 'Prison/Psychiatric State,'" she describes the Massachusetts-based Coalition to Stop Institutional Violence's (CSIV) successful campaign to halt the construction of a center for violent women that would have housed prisoners deemed dangerous within a state mental institution. CSIV brought together critiques of psychiatry and critiques of the prison system by showing how both sought to define and police normative behavior. They argued that the designation of women as violent pathologized women prisoners' agency and that behavior modification constituted yet another form of violence against women. With this case study, Thuma shows how CSIV was a site for the development of a feminist abolitionist politics and practice that was also linked to a critique of psychiatry and ableism. Activists within the CSIV came to see incarceration itself as a form of violence against women and argued that addressing interpersonal violence against women required social transformation. Similarly, in her last chapter, "Intersecting Indictments: Coalitions for Women's Safety, Racial Justice, and the Right to the City," Thuma highlights the work of two Black feminist coalitions to end violence. Looking at the Boston-based Coalition for Women's Safety, Thuma shows how activists made connections between the way the murders of Black women were ignored by the police to the racial profiling and wrongful prosecution of Black men for rape, thereby demonstrating the threat that the criminal justice system posed to the Black community's safety. Similarly, in her discussion of the work of the DC Rape Crisis Center, she argues that Black feminists pushed the organization toward an anticarceral stance and reframed violence as not just deriving from individual perpetrators but rather from the larger structures that enabled them.

One of the most compelling chapters in the book, "Printing Abolition: The Transformative Power of Women's Prison Newsletters," focuses on the role that print culture played in an abolitionist feminist "world-making project" (89). Thuma reconstructs the history of *No More Cages* and *Through the Looking Glass*, two women's prison newsletters from the 1970s, and shows the central role they played in connecting incarcerated women to each other and to women on the outside. The newsletters themselves constitute an archive of "the systematic character of state-sponsored sexual violence and coercion in US prisons" (110) as they document experiences with sexual assault, reproductive violence, medical neglect, and psychiatric confinement. At the same time, Thuma shows how the newsletters produced a shared feminist abolitionist imagined community that challenged the isolation of incarceration and threatened the prison's totalizing control. The newsletters enabled readers both inside and outside of the prison to see themselves as part of a shared public that was constituted in opposition to the carceral state. Notably, one of the most striking aspects of *All Our Trials* is the extraordinary images that Thuma includes throughout the book. The many posters, newsletter covers, and pictures from protests she has chosen showcase

the activism she describes while the book itself extends the shared public that anticarceral activists sought to produce by recirculating their work.

All Our Trials is excellent historical scholarship that makes a significant contribution to rethinking feminist history and offers important insights for feminist and abolitionist social movements today. An obvious choice for courses on US women's history, *All Our Trials* is also well suited for any course that grapples with feminist social movements. There are many striking parallels between the prisoner defense campaigns, advocacy for women prisoners, and efforts to create safety without relying on the state that Thuma documents and the work that anticarceral feminist activists are engaging in today, giving the book a broad appeal to a readership that is not just academic. Most importantly, *All Our Trials* is a profoundly optimistic and inspiring book. While Thuma does not shy away from the complexities and difficulties of challenging intersectional structural oppression, she demonstrates the real power of activism and the way that organizations that are often easily dismissed as too radical or utopian can have far-reaching impacts.

Priya Kandaswamy is an associate professor of women, gender, and sexuality studies at Mills College in Oakland, California. Her research focuses on the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class in the history of the US welfare state. Her articles have appeared in journals such as *Sexualities*, *American Quarterly*, and *Radical Teacher*, as well as numerous edited anthologies.

High-Tech Housewives: Indian IT Workers, Gendered Labor and Transmigration by Amy Bhatt. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018, 204 pp., \$90.00 hardcover, \$30.00 paper.

Soniya Munshi

In *High-Tech Housewives: Indian IT Workers, Gendered Labor, and Transmigration*, gender and women's studies scholar Amy Bhatt centers the unpaid and undervalued women's labor that sustains the circulation of Indian transnational migrant (or, transmigrant) information technology workers among different global technology hubs. Through rich ethnographic research that includes formal interviews with almost one hundred respondents, mostly women, in the understudied IT sites of Seattle, Washington, and Bangalore and Hyderabad in India, Bhatt deftly engages the complex experiences of these "embodied subjects of transnationalism" (ix) who are positioned between and across geographic locations, immigration statuses, and company affiliations. Resisting simplified characterizations that valorize or demonize temporary worker programs, Bhatt's nuanced analysis shows that Indian transnational IT workers and their spouses