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Race, the Citizen and the LA Human: Race Relations and State Violence in Globalized Los Angeles

By centering the Los Angeles County Jail as a site existing outside the prevailing narrative of race relations in Los Angeles, this paper will consider the racial subject in relation to the project of human relations as a discursive and material practice. This practice, I argue, creates population within a population that exists outside of the realm of the universal Human. Presently considered one of the fastest growing global cities, Los Angeles is indexed at number six by Foreign Policy magazine in terms of its human capital, i.e. the incorporation of diverse groups of people and talent as they contribute to the city's productive terrain and international status. Although much smaller than other global cities in terms of the number of its inhabitants, Los Angeles is home to the largest jail on the planet. The overwhelming majority of the inmate population are African American and Latino men and women. I argue that recent academic and civic endeavors to examine the relations between the Black and Brown communities in Los Angeles ultimately lend themselves to the administration of state violence. Although these endeavors, as a discursive and material practice, acknowledge racial differentiation (and rely on it for its own production), they have produced a unified entity identifiable as one that necessitates the punishment and early death meted out by the state. This paper shows how this jailed racial schema follows less along the lines of differentiated ethnic and racial groups (i.e., Black and Brown) and more along those of citizen vs. criminal or human vs. non-human. Through this analysis, I delineate a genealogy of state violence against the racial body that exists (always) outside the law. In the process, this paper asks: what does the ideological and political work of racist state violence look like before it enters the confines of the L.A. County Jail? How have the projects of "human relations" and sociologies of multiculturalism—the state-sponsored management of conflict and the institutionalization of reconciliation—been used to marginalize, police, and eradicate Black and Brown people? How and why does this population within a population exist outside the prevailing ideas of the human, society and the law?