

Introduction

Apache is compact and muscular.¹ He talks fast and low in an eloquent rumble. At 34 years old, the Black American man recently finished his second stint in a New York State prison where he was incarcerated, he explained philosophically, for “a certain lifestyle”—an ontological way of being in the world—rather than for any single crime. “In order to change that lifestyle,” he said, “it’s a process. . . . You have to get stripped down to look at yourself.” For Apache this process was accelerated by the birth of his third child while he was in prison. “For me to miss his birth and have him visit me in a prison and then not get to touch him, just see him through a glass. That took, like, mad layers off.” He was emotionally “stripped down.”

Like all able-bodied prisoners in New York State, Apache was required to work in prison. He worked six hours a day in the mess hall—preparing and serving food, washing dishes, scouring the kitchen—for which he was paid 15¢–17¢ an hour, nearly \$13 every two weeks.² Earning these wages in prison, Apache said,

You convince yourself that you in a good position as far as, you know, getting by. Because you locked down, you ain’t got to pay no light bill and this, that, and the other. But it’s still slave labor at the end of the day . . . because you don’t get to call off, you don’t get sick days, you don’t get a union. You don’t

get none of the benefits of a normal worker. You can't really even advance. You can't aspire to be the boss one day. And, I mean, you're getting paid fifteen cents an hour.

Yet even as Apache described prisoners' work as "slave labor," he argued that it should not be otherwise. Prisoners should not earn the higher wages and other "benefits of a normal worker," he said, because the purpose of prison labor is punishment. "It's not supposed to be a camp," he explained. "It's not supposed to be a happy place. . . . We're in prison. We're not supposed to come in and kick our feet up."

I mean, I think the best thing is to stay out of prison. I couldn't really conjure somebody getting a lot of money working in prison. It wouldn't really make sense to me. . . . I mean, you're in prison, people are paying taxes and you're not doing nothing. I mean, like, even my wife and my moms, they're out there working and they were sending me money, and that didn't make me feel good . . . and, if you really look at the grand scheme of things, *you* were out there working for me, to take care of me. I mean, the tax they took out of your check, they put it somewhere, and somewhere down the line it came in [the prison]. So, my best advice—even though I *am* an advocate [for prisoners] and I don't want to sound like a hater, but—*just don't go*. If you don't want to be put in that position, *then don't go*.³

Whether or not one agrees with Apache's view of prisoners, his description of their labor captures their contradictory position as *workers* in American citizenry: they are "slave labor" yet they are also "doing nothing" while others are "paying taxes" and "working for" them. For like all Americans, prisoners are culturally expected to fulfill a moral obligation to work, the shirking of which—perceived or real—has long been used to justify exclusion from the rights of productive citizenship.⁴ Yet prisoners work not only to avoid a stigmatized state of dependence. They also have to work *because* they are dependent. They are the sole exception to the U.S. Constitution's prohibition of slavery. As the 13th Amendment states, "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, *except as a punishment for crime* . . . shall exist within the United States."⁵ In short, prisoners can be forced to work. Their incarceration not only justifies the compulsion of their labor; it also serves as the legal rationale for their exclusion from employment rights and protections, including the federal minimum wage,

overtime pay, and collective bargaining.⁶ Because they are prisoners, they can be required to work but, because they are prisoners, they are not protected as workers under labor and employment law. Like enslaved people in years past,⁷ American prisoners can be compelled to work while being denied the rights and protections of productive workers, while also condemned for not being such workers. As Apache said, they are at once “slave labor” and “doing nothing.” It is this cultural and legal intersection of *working* but not being recognized as *workers* that allows prisoners’ labor—and that of others, as we will see—to be characterized by the coercion that I examine in this book.

Prisoners are, in many ways, exceptional. They have been convicted of crimes; they are institutionally confined and therefore physically and economically dependent on the state; and as noted above, they can be legally forced to work. Even still, prisoners’ contradictory position at the crossroads of compulsory labor (“slave labor”) and culturally constructed idleness (“doing nothing”) is not unique. Take, for example, workfare workers: welfare recipients who are required to work 25–35 hours a week in order to receive public assistance. They are assigned to jobs—often janitorial or bookkeeping in nature—in public parks, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and (in New York City at least) subway stations, but their labor is construed as “work experience” rather than work.⁸ As a result, instead of wages their work garners a relatively meager combination of cash benefits, rental and utility assistance, and food stamps (now SNAP), along with childcare during work hours.⁹

There are many dynamics unique to this labor relation, of course, as there are for prisoners. Yet there are also important economic, legal, and cultural parallels between workfare and incarcerated labor. On a structural level, in fact, the U.S. welfare system can be conceptualized as the feminized counterpart to the masculinized criminal justice system, as both are highly racialized, gendered, and classed institutions of social control and subjugation in the United States.¹⁰ Within this system, moreover, workfare workers—much like prisoners—are compelled to work, as their labor is a prerequisite for their continued access to key elements of the social safety net. Meanwhile, the labor of both of these groups yields financial returns for their respective institutions. Workfare workers provide cost savings to the nonprofit organizations and government agencies that

use their labor at no cost. Likewise, because incarcerated workers do much of prisons' everyday operations and upkeep work (e.g., food service, cleaning, utilities maintenance), their low- or no-wage labor generates substantial cost savings for prisons and state agencies, while also generating revenue through the sale of prisoner-made goods and services.

Despite their labor, workfare workers—like prisoners—are seen as dependent on the state and are culturally disparaged as being a “drain on the economy” and a “burden” on taxpayers.¹¹ Indeed, workfare workers themselves often take part in this disparagement, echoing Apache's reprobation of prisoners. As workfare worker April Smith said of other welfare recipients, “A lot of people lay around, they don't do anything.” To the contrary, studies suggest that most welfare recipients, like most Americans, believe deeply in the importance of work.¹² Even still, welfare recipients are seen as uniquely economically dependent on the state (in contrast to other demographic groups who, for example, receive Social Security benefits or federally subsidized student loans), and as with prisoners, this socially constructed dependence is used to justify their exclusion from many legal protections as “employees.” In both cases, these workers' economic dependence is reified, and even intensified, by the extra constraints of their labor relations. For instance, both workfare and incarcerated workers cannot freely choose whether and for whom they work, nor can they freely change or quit their jobs. Yet in the (white) American imagination, such restrictions are justified by welfare recipients' and prisoners' (interrelated) criminalization and marginalization. As convicts, prisoners are overtly criminalized, while welfare recipients' criminalization is the product of the more insidious “criminalization of poverty,” a political, legal, and cultural superstructure built on the presumption of their fraudulence and enacted through their punitive surveillance and bodily regulation.¹³ For both of these groups of workers, this criminalization is at once cause and consequence of their social marginalization, as they each confront high levels of stigmatization, pathologization, and subjugation at their particular intersections of race, class, and gender disadvantage.¹⁴

Thus, in America's convoluted raced, classed, and gendered cultural logic, both welfare recipients and prisoners can, *and should*, be compelled to work because they are convicted or suspected criminals and because they are deemed to be unduly dependent on the state. Because of such

dependence, workfare and incarcerated workers are not seen as “real” workers—regardless of their labor—and are therefore not protected by labor and employment laws. In fact, their economic independence is overtly curtailed by the institutions for which they labor. Yet all the while they are culturally condemned for being idle.

These parallels are perhaps not surprising. Scholars have persuasively argued that the carceral and welfare states in America comprise a “single policy regime,”¹⁵ which has taken a “resolutely punitive turn” in recent decades with carceral expansion and social welfare contraction.¹⁶ This two-pronged policy regime has been built at the state level through political discourse, legislation, and budgetary spending (and cuts).¹⁷ On the ground level, as I have argued elsewhere, it has been rolled out through the dual expansion of workfare and incarcerated labor—“punitive labor regimes”¹⁸—in which welfare recipients and prisoners experience firsthand the penalizing and paternalistic power of what Loïc Wacquant has called the neoliberal “centaur state.”¹⁹

As this book will show, however, understanding the U.S. carceral and welfare states as a single policy regime—and workers’ marginalized labor within it—does not fully explain these workers’ contradictory position as “slave labor” and “doing nothing.” In fact, focusing solely on the points of intersection between prison labor and workfare, as important and compelling as they are, may obscure their parallels to other *very different* categories of work that can be found beyond the “carceral archipelago.”²⁰

Take university student workers, such as college football and basketball players and graduate student researchers in the sciences. To be sure, these students are *far removed* from prisoners and welfare recipients in many (almost innumerable) ways. While the latter groups are scapegoated as cultural exemplars of personal and moral failure, college athletes and PhD students are the opposite: they are cultural role models, and as a result, their day-to-day lives, as well as their future trajectories, are vastly different. The stigmatization, criminalization, and punishment which characterize daily life for many prisoners and welfare recipients differ dramatically from the near hero worship of some college athletes, whose ardent fans don replicas of their jerseys, hang their action shots on dorm-room walls, and cheer for them wildly from the sidelines. And though graduate students are not nearly such campus and cultural icons, they too occupy a

position of social privilege, walking the halls of the “ivory tower” in pursuit of new knowledge and advanced educational degrees.

Despite these important differences, there are also parallels between these groups in their interstitial status as workers. For instance, though there is controversy about whether these student workers should be legally categorized as “employees”—just as there is about incarcerated and workfare workers²¹—they arguably perform labor: for hours a day, athletes sweat in sports arenas, and graduate students run experiments and analyze data in science labs. Like incarcerated and workfare workers, both student groups have professional counterparts who *are* considered rights-bearing workers: professional athletes in the NFL and NBA, science researchers in industry and academia. Furthermore, like incarcerated and workfare workers, these students’ labor yields substantial financial returns, not for themselves but for their institutions and other stakeholders. In fact, the athletic labor of Division I football and basketball players can generate multimillion-dollar salaries for their coaches and even more for their universities, athletic conferences, and the NCAA itself.²² Private companies as well have profited handsomely from athletes’ labor by commodifying their names, photographs, likenesses, jersey numbers, and equipment, although court rulings have begun to proscribe some of these practices.²³

In the academic sciences, PhD students and postdocs conduct much, and sometimes all, of faculty research. While faculty members design and oversee research projects in the lab, graduate students typically do the labor necessary to carry out such projects. Yet the products of their labor—publications, inventions, patents, and more—are owned by the faculty member in charge of the lab. As a result, faculty in the sciences are often bosses as well as teachers, and these students’ graduate education is often a labor relation as well as a learning one. This stands in contrast to my own discipline of sociology, for example, in which graduate students generally devise and pursue their own research agendas (not their advisors’), and so their PhD research is not a labor relation in the same way. Yet it is also true that many graduate students across academic disciplines, including sociology, work under their advisors as teaching and research assistants, so that their labor would indeed be characterized by the type of coercion I examine in this book. In the sciences, such dynamics are often more acute, not least because graduate student labor is the foundation of the

scientific enterprise in the academy. As Slaughter and colleagues write in their study of science and engineering faculty, “one cannot be a professor unless he or she does research, and a professor cannot do research without graduate students.”²⁴ Such research, fueled by graduate student labor, is the primary driver of the research-publication-grant cycle, which generates substantial financial returns for universities and faculty alike. For their part, graduate students are paid less than market value for their labor—indeed, they are widely referred to as “cheap”²⁵—and their labor is largely paid for by the external grants it helps obtain. Yet such grants pay for much more than graduate student stipends; they supplement faculty salaries and subsidize universities’ “indirect costs” (e.g., administrative support and facility maintenance). Beyond these immediate financial returns, graduate student labor helps universities cultivate their reputation as generators of scientific innovation, enabling them to recruit faculty and students, and thereby sustain the cycle.

Despite their labor, graduate students and college athletes have been legally deemed “primarily students” rather than workers.²⁶ Although workers, activists, and even judges have challenged this sociolegal construction, both groups are still broadly considered trainees instead of employees: apprentices in the lab, amateurs on the field. As a result, they are paid in education and training rather than wages, though they often also receive basic stipends.²⁷ As students, moreover, their earnings outside of the lab and off the court can be capped. For graduate students in the sciences, for example, the general expectation is that they will not hold any other job, and this expectation can be formalized and enforced by granting agencies, universities, departments, and faculty advisors alike.²⁸ Regardless, the science graduate students I interviewed said that long hours in the lab rendered other employment out of the question. This was also the case for the college athletes I interviewed, who said that their intensive training and traveling schedules precluded them from taking other jobs. In any case, the NCAA explicitly restricts what kind of employment Division I athletes can accept and how much they can earn.²⁹ Indeed, with the very recent exception of California, athletes (along with their families) are not allowed to profit from their athletic labor in any way: aside from any university stipend they might receive, they cannot accept money, gifts, or meals for their athleticism or any activities that stem from it, such as selling autographs or

endorsing products.³⁰ Such nonpayment is the underpinning of college athletes' "amateurism," NCAA officials assert, which "is crucial to preserving an academic environment in which acquiring a quality education is the first priority."³¹ Thus, in a true tautology (recalling that of prisoners), college athletes cannot profit from their athletic labor because they are students, and because they are students they cannot profit from their athletic labor. Moreover, football and basketball players in particular are effectively required to play at the collegiate level before playing professionally.³² In these revenue-generating sports, athletes are compelled to perform unpaid athletic labor before they can be paid for it.

Like incarcerated and workfare workers, then, college athletes and graduate students work but are not seen as workers.³³ They cannot earn (or earn much) from their labor, and their economic independence—their ability to sell their labor and expertise—is restricted. They too are culturally and legally constructed as economic dependents: amateurs and trainees gaining education and experience. Yet *unlike* incarcerated and workfare workers, for whom the cultural condemnation of their racialized and gendered criminality and poverty justifies such dependence, college athletes' and graduate students' relatively privileged status as university students justifies theirs. For while incarcerated and workfare workers are socially constructed as *immoral* dependents who require punitive state intervention to attend to their criminality and poverty, college athletes and graduate students are constructed as *moral* dependents who benefit from paternalist state intervention. They are seen as being gifted—even uplifted through—education. Yet for football and basketball players, the majority of whom are racial minorities,³⁴ the racialized overtones of such "uplift" cannot be ignored. In fact, as I show in chapter 1, they echo the paternalism of 19th-century slave owners in the American South,³⁵ thus pointing to even more parallels between college athletics and the racialized regimes of workfare and incarcerated labor in America today.

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Broadly speaking, then, there are surprising parallels across these diverse cases: graduate students, college athletes, workfare participants, and prisoners are all sociolegally constructed as something other than "workers"

doing something other than “work.” Rather than rights-bearing employees, they are dependents whose economic independence is constrained, as they cannot freely seek additional or alternative employment. They do not earn free-market wages for their labor and in fact are often paid in something other than money altogether.

This book does not argue, simplistically and narrowly, that all of these groups should be legally categorized as “employees.” Their legal exclusion is the starting point of this analysis, not its endpoint. My task is at once larger and messier. Through a comparative analysis of these strikingly different labor relations, I identify key similarities between them: not just their status as nonworkers, but how this status shapes the power dynamics that define their workplaces.

I find that in all of these cases, as different from each other as they are, workers’ status as something other than rights-bearing employees allows for their supervisors to have unusually *expansive punitive power* over them. For instance, if prisoners do not comply with officer demands, the consequence is not just being fired from the job, though that may also happen. They can be fined a week’s pay, lose their eligibility for parole, and be put in solitary confinement, that is, within an enclosed and segregated cell for 23 hours a day without human interaction. Indeed, any form of noncompliance, large or small, can land prisoners in the “box” (as those in New York State often refer to solitary confinement),³⁶ making it a relatively common occurrence. Although precise data are not available, it is estimated that 80,000–100,000 people in the United States (and 4,500 in New York) are held in some type of isolation at any given time, and often for significant periods of time: an average of 5 months in New York and 18 months in Colorado, though in fact solitary sentences can be indefinite.³⁷ The mental and physiological consequences of such prolonged isolation are well documented and severe: PTSD, anxiety, depression, suicide, paranoia, insomnia, hallucinations, psychosis, dizziness, headaches, lethargy, heart palpitations, and more.³⁸ At least one bioethicist has called solitary confinement “the worst kind of psychological torture.”³⁹ Yet such “torture” is a routine consequence that officers—as labor supervisors as well as guards—can mete out to prisoners.

For the other workers I studied, the punishments that their bosses can impose are usually less severe, but the reach of their bosses’ power is

similarly expansive. For instance, if workfare workers do not comply with their caseworkers' or workfare supervisors' demands, they can be "sanctioned," which means that they lose access to public assistance programs, such as cash benefits, rent and utility subsidies, Medicaid, childcare and transportation assistance, and SNAP benefits—elements of the social safety net which are crucial to families in poverty.⁴⁰ Although such sanctions are usually temporary, their effects are permanent. In addition to any long-term consequences for themselves and their families, including those of homelessness and extreme poverty,⁴¹ welfare sanctions reduce their lifetime allotment of public assistance under TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families).⁴²

For the university student workers in this study—college athletes and graduate students—the punitive power their bosses can wield is less severe still, though nonetheless far-reaching. For instance, if Division I athletes do not comply with their coaches' directives, they may lose their playing time, that is, the much sought-after chance to compete at an elite collegiate level and the professional recruitment opportunities it provides. They may also lose their scholarships and thus their education and undergraduate degrees. Likewise, the education, degree conferral, and future employment of science graduate students are in the hands of the faculty advisors for whom they labor. Such advisors can dismiss them from the PhD program as well as delay their graduation because they have become productive workers in the lab. Advisors also have total authority over students' academic record in the sciences, particularly their publications, which in combination with letters of recommendation give them immense power over students' futures.

Of course, not all faculty advisors, coaches, case workers, and corrections officers deploy these punitive powers. But those who do are not "bad apples." They are not exceptions to the rule. They are the rule. Their access to such expansive punitive power is simply a matter of course in these labor relations and, as a result, often remains unquestioned by workers and supervisors alike. This is simply "how things are done" in these workplaces. If a prisoner does not comply with an officer's orders, he will likely be put in the "box." If a workfare worker does not adhere to her supervisor's directives, she may very well be sanctioned. If an athlete does not comply with her coach's dictates, she will likely lose playing time. If a

graduate student does not follow his advisor's directives, he may well lose his advisor's support for future employment. Thus, graduate students, college athletes, workfare workers, and prisoners not only labor in the absence of most employment protections and remedies; they labor *under the threat of punishment*. Whether or not they experience such punishment, they are acutely aware of the punitive power that their supervisors can wield and this awareness pervades the workplace, fundamentally shaping their actions and experiences.

To be sure, bosses in all workplaces wield substantial, and expansive, power over their subordinates. Most often, they do so through their capacity to hire, promote, schedule, and fire workers, that is, the economic coercion that Karl Marx identified as endemic to capitalist labor relations.⁴³ Because the "economic whip of the market" is ever present for workers in this system, the fear of losing one's job may compel—indeed, coerce—their compliance.⁴⁴ This form of coercion is particularly acute in this era of resurgent labor precarity. For although the market's lash can be softened by strong worker protections and a sturdy social safety net, such is not the case for American workers at the start of the 21st century, who face rising employment insecurity and welfare retrenchment along with intense social stigmatization of unemployment and welfare. Even the nontraditional workers in this book face economic coercion, at least to some degree, as their "wages"—prison earnings, public assistance, and student stipends—are often essential to their material well-being.

But the workers in this book face a different form of coercion as well. For their bosses can do more than harness the lash of the market by firing them or assigning them worse work schedules. Their bosses can also disrupt their familial relationships (e.g., through solitary confinement or, much less severely, through long work hours in the lab); they can harm their health and well-being as well as that of their families (e.g., through solitary confinement, welfare sanctions, or pressure to play through injuries); and they can thwart their education, aspirations, and future employment (e.g., by withdrawing or withholding scholarship/funding, playing time, graduation, or positive letters of recommendation). Thus, in these labor relations bosses' punitive power extends beyond the immediate job and its wages to affect workers' lives in even more expansive ways. For incarcerated, workfare, athlete, and graduate student workers, then, the

primary threat is not that they will lose their jobs, though that may also be of concern. Rather, it is what might happen to their bodies, families, and futures if they refuse to comply with their bosses' demands.

In existing scholarship there is no term that adequately captures this type of punitive power. In my search to find such a term, I looked to Marxian frameworks where the most productive tools for such analysis have been developed. Initially, the Marxian term "extra-economic coercion" seemed to capture this type of expansive employer power, as it is *beyond economic* in nature. Yet in the literature, this term is not usually used in this narrow, literal way. Instead, "extra-economic" has been used to distinguish (purportedly) precapitalist types of labor coercion from capitalism's economic coercion.⁴⁵ As a result, it has become an umbrella term for an array of coercive employer powers, including physical coercion (violence and threats thereof, as in chattel slavery), economic and legal limits on worker mobility (as in debt peonage and vagrancy laws), and political and economic limits on land use (as in feudalism).⁴⁶ As the latter examples suggest, such coercion was at least somewhat economic in nature, despite being labeled "extra-economic."⁴⁷ Similarly, as scholars have argued, "economic coercion" itself is not strictly economic in nature, as it also has social, legal, and political dimensions.⁴⁸ Thus, as used in the literature at least, "economic" and "extra-economic" coercions pertain more to their context—capitalist versus precapitalist—than to the nature of the coercion itself. This is in spite of the fact that, as scholars have shown, extra-economic coercion was not necessarily precapitalist at all.⁴⁹ As demonstrated by studies of U.S. slavery, for example, this violent and brutal system of forced labor was essential, not antithetical, to America's emergence as a modern, industrial, capitalist economy.⁵⁰ Then, after slavery was abolished and free labor was ostensibly universalized, forced and coerced labor remained entrenched, as evidenced by the persistence of sharecropping, debt peonage, indentured servitude, and prison labor as American capitalism developed.⁵¹ Meanwhile, even purportedly "free" labor was underpinned by coercion through the 19th century. Because of employers' widespread use of criminal sanctions and wage forfeiture to enforce employment contracts, "free" workers were not actually free to quit their jobs.⁵² Therefore, although the term "extra-economic" might seem definitionally appropriate to the type of coercion I analyze here, the term itself is

used otherwise, while also implicated in outdated binarisms between economic and noneconomic, capitalist and precapitalist, and free and unfree labor, all of which have been disrupted in the scholarly literature.

Beyond intervening in such debates, I believe it is more analytically productive to identify what this type of coercion *is* rather than what it is not (e.g., economic), for doing so highlights the mechanism by which it operates. In this vein, “economic coercion” is aptly named because it operates primarily through pecuniary compulsion. The same is true of “physical coercion,” which operates through corporal compulsion. While the workers in this book experience some degree of economic coercion and, in the case of prisoners, physical coercion, the type of coercion that permeates their labor does not operate through either pecuniary or corporal mechanisms. Rather, it operates through *status*. Their supervisors have the power to discharge them from a particular status—as prisoner, welfare recipient, college athlete, or graduate student “in good standing”—and thereby deprive them of the rights, privileges, and future opportunities that such status confers. Thus, I argue that these labor relations are characterized by *status coercion*.

Status is a foundational sociological concept. Developed by anthropologist Ralph Linton in the 1930s, the term refers to individuals’ positions in society, both ascribed and achieved, such as female, parent, professor, and prisoner.⁵³ Such statuses come with important (though sometimes conflicting) rights, obligations, limitations, and expectations (“roles”), which are often normative in nature but which can also be codified in law. The workers in this book, for example, do not occupy the status of “worker,” and therefore do not have access to the cultural standing and legal rights and protections that this status usually yields. Instead, they occupy a variety of other statuses, each of which comes with its own obligations, constraints, rights, and privileges (however attenuated). To be sure, such statuses are not always desirable. It is likely that no one desires to occupy the status of prisoner. But once in it, retaining one’s status as *prisoner in good standing* is of utmost importance, because it gives prisoners access to the many human entitlements that become “privileges” behind bars—privileges which can be revoked. For example, being in good standing allows prisoners to sustain relationships with family and friends (through phone use, visitation, and interaction with fellow prisoners), while also giving them access to activity,

recreation, and freedom of movement (albeit constrained), money, food, and consumer goods (through work assignments and commissary purchases), and sometimes early release from prison (through parole or commutation). Thus, although “prisoner” is not a desirable status, as it imposes many more constraints than privileges, when one is living behind bars, maintaining one’s status as a “good” prisoner is desirable indeed.

The other statuses that I examine in this book are similar, for even when they impose constraints on their worker-occupants, they also offer important rights and privileges. For workfare workers, for example, being a welfare recipient in good standing is a prerequisite for their continued access to key safety net programs and even homeless shelters. For Division I college athletes, occupying that status in good standing gives them access to subsidized university education and the credentials it confers, as well as the chance to play the sport they love and, for some, professional recruitment opportunities (perhaps even fame and future fortune). Likewise, being a graduate student in good standing offers access to subsidized graduate education as well as high-status credentials, experience, training, and professional opportunities. Even though these statuses do not confer the right to a minimum wage or collective bargaining, as would the status of “worker,” they offer rights and privileges that are highly valued within their respective institutions. Yet in each of these cases, supervisors have the capacity to revoke such rights and privileges, the consequences of which extend beyond the job to affect these workers’ lives, families, and futures in far-reaching ways. This control over status—status coercion—is the basis for supervisors’ expansive punitive power in these labor relations.

But, of course, these workers do not experience this type of coercion to the same degree. Much like the differing degrees of economic coercion across jobs and workers in the conventional labor market, the status coercion that these workers experience is similar in kind but not intensity. Indeed, the severity of the punitive power that their bosses wield differs dramatically across these groups: solitary confinement is *far removed* from losing playing time on the field; welfare sanctions are *far removed* from being dismissed from PhD programs. As in conventional jobs, moreover, workers’ demographic characteristics—their particular identity at the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality, and more—may make them more or less likely to be targets of their bosses’ punitive power, and

their vulnerability to such power can be mitigated (or intensified) by their personal circumstances.⁵⁴ There is significant variation, then, both within and across these labor relations in the severity of workers' experience of status coercion. The goal of this book, however, is not to document such variation, but to delineate the contours of this form of labor coercion.

To be sure, the labor relations I examine in this book are not the only ones characterized by status coercion. Take, for example, foreign guest workers and undocumented immigrant workers, both noncitizen workers for whom U.S. employers have *de facto* power of deportation. Because guest workers are legally bound to a single employer, the Southern Poverty Law Center reports, "At any moment, the employer can fire the worker, call the government and declare the worker to be 'illegal.'"⁵⁵ A similar dynamic is in effect for undocumented workers, because under U.S. immigration law employers are empowered—and in fact obligated—to verify workers' citizenship status.⁵⁶ This means that at any point they can "discover" workers' undocumented status and contact immigration authorities. In both cases, then, employers can convert workers into criminals ("illegal aliens")—directly for guest workers and indirectly for undocumented immigrants by exposing their illegality—leaving them subject to detention and deportation. In short, employers have power over noncitizen workers' status as *worker* or *criminal* and the privileges or punishments that each yields. Thus, like the labor relations I examine in this book, noncitizen labor is characterized by status coercion. And as studies of noncitizen workers have shown, employers' access to this legal form of punitive power seems to facilitate their use of illegal exploitation and coercion, such as paying subminimum wages, providing unsafe working and living conditions, seizing passports, and blacklisting.⁵⁷ In fact, this also seems to be true of the labor relations in this book: bosses' licit power of status coercion seems to open the door, at least for some, to illicit abuse.

Status coercion is not relegated to such extreme or unusual labor relations. Many conventional workers also experience status coercion, at least to some degree. At the most basic level, being fired from one's job means being ejected from one's status as *worker* and the considerable rights and privileges it confers. Such loss of status can have significant psychological and physiological consequences in addition to economic consequences, especially for those who are culturally or financially expected to be "breadwinners."⁵⁸ For