

proves ineffective, it is nonetheless quite efficient in generating profits.

Security, like capitalism, is no doubt lucrative for a small few, while abandoning the rest to more intensive biopolitical control, increased exposure and risk, and greater precarity. Such inequalities make it crucial but also exceedingly difficult to “defund security,” per their concluding imperative, perhaps as difficult as abolishing capitalism itself. The twining together of security and capitalism suggests the scope of the challenge that Maguire and Low meet by urging five strategies: opening the gates; taking back the city; reimagining policing; countering counterterrorism; and reclaiming the homeland. Easier said than done—but that does not make the saying any less valuable.

Response to Russ Castronovo’s Review of *Trapped: Life under Security Capitalism and How to Escape It*

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— Mark Maguire
— Setha Low 

As we reviewed each other’s books about security, student protests erupted on campuses from the Sorbonne to Sydney. Although the protestors’ message often vanished in the fog of the culture wars, one demand rang out: Universities should divest from security-capitalist enterprises that send weapons and surveillance systems to warzones. Back in 1961, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned of the unwarranted influence of national security interests on public life, especially on “the free university.” Today, well over half a century later, university managers invest in arms companies, salivate over defense contracts, and compete to host homeland security “fusion centers.” The free university too has been captured by security capitalism.

Russ Castronovo’s *American Insecurity* and our book, *Trapped*, are complementary projects that expose the conceptual toxicity of security and its corrosive presence in public life, including in universities. Read together, we argue, our books challenge overly narrow or sympathetic conceptualizations of security and show us its historical roots and contemporary forms. *American Insecurity* provides readers with rich historical examples. Whether we are

reading about Thomas Jefferson’s fears about Black and Indigenous population growth or raging settler violence, Castronovo teaches us that securitization flowers where people fear one another. And he shows how these fears are fertilized by new ways of gathering and representing information which, along with security’s aesthetic elements, seeds further division and anxiety. In *American Insecurity*, security appears as a perpetual work-in-progress, and its subject, *homo securus*, always has some new vulnerability in need of attention. “Security may be a precondition of freedom,” Castronovo reminds us, “but it is also the case that political freedom cannot exist without insecurity” (p. 39).

Of course, as anthropologists, we approach security from a different direction. Like Castronovo, we are alarmed by governmental appeals to security and the childlike handling of this unstable and potentially toxic concept. However, we also treat concepts as ethnographic subjects, and we have noticed that a gap exists between security as formulated and security as experienced—to paraphrase Seneca, the state’s security does not imply safety for its citizens. In our work on gated community residents, police, and security consultants, we noticed two remarkable things. First, in many areas of life, such as those just mentioned, where one would expect *homo securus* to be at least partially settled, we find intense discomfort with the current socio-political configuration. Second, rather than being subject to securitization, the residents, officials, and entrepreneurs who participated in our research were vital to its operation. Germany’s chancellor recently announced, “*Ohne Sicherheit ist alles nichts.*” (Without security, there is nothing). However, the reverse is true also: without public resources and consent, votes, and sympathetic intellectual voices, security is nothing.

In 1961, Eisenhower called on an “alert and knowledgeable citizenry” to fight against the unwarranted influence of the military-industrial complex. Today, students are fighting to free the university from the pernicious influence of security capitalism, but “security” is also the ground where struggles are taking place over racial discrimination, unequal access to residences and cities, policing, and anti-terrorism. Our book, *Trapped*, addresses those who have achieved security, only to realize they are neither safe nor free.