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What is the historical role of punishment in the management of labour? This is the central question of this Special Issue. In order to answer this question, the contributors look into the histories of blinded slaves in ancient Mesopotamia, flogged peasant farmers in pharaonic Egypt, convict officers in the prisons of colonial India, and blacklisted factory workers in the nineteenth-century United States, as well as rural workers in the medieval Frankish kingdoms, soldiers and domestic servants in early modern Scandinavia, working children in colonial Bolivia, textile workers in Lombardy, enslaved Africans in Brazil and the US, and household workers in Late Imperial China. The introduction suggests ways to compare the role of punishment in the management of labour across space and time. The editors claim that the effective management of labour required the systematic differentiation of the workforce; to that end, the imposition of diversified forms of punishment did not merely reflect existing labour distinctions, but also contributed to their creation.

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