Since the rise of clinical rehabilitation in the 1960s, states have adopted numerous sentencing technologies to “improve” the distribution of punishment. This article identifies three social concepts that altered through or alongside these technological sentencing interventions: “rehabilitation” mutated to risk management; “racial equality” mutated to technical formalism; and “dangerousness” and “recidivism risk” merged in social meaning. These altered social concepts, and not scientific advancement, underlie the proliferation of actuarial risk tools as sentencing reform today. They also obscure and legitimate the expansion of castigatory government surveillance in marginalized communities, resignation to racialize sentencing practices, and expansion of the carceral net. By connecting technological interventions and conceptual transformations, this article seeks to balance and expand debates about pragmatic technological sentencing reforms. Such reforms not only threaten to stall broader changes that address society’s deeper issues of race, class, and power. They strip us of a language to resist the status quo by changing society’s notions of justice along the way.

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