

IMPRISONED VOICES: THE RHETORICS OF COMMUNITY IN PRISON WRITINGS

Helen Hye Eun Lee

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English and Comparative Literature.

Chapel Hill
2016

Approved by:

Jane Danielewicz

Daniel Anderson

Jordynn Jack

Ruth Salvaggio

Ashley Luca

© 2016
Helen Hye Eun Lee
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABSTRACT

Helen Hye Eun Lee: Imprisoned Voices: The Rhetorics of Community in Prison Writings
(Under the direction of Jane Danielewicz)

In this dissertation, I examine contemporary U.S. prison writings of the late twentieth and twenty-first century, namely Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*, Mumia Abu-Jamal's *Live from Death Row*, and Jimmy Santiago Baca's *A Place to Stand*. In this study, I read them as highly political and rhetorical works of protest in which they speak out about the problems of the criminal justice and penal systems. The three writers use their works to not only make visible the obscured space of prison but also bridge spatially and socially separated communities using innovative rhetorical strategies. As I will show, prison writings are works of protest that can be defined by the social work they perform.

To Jay, Caleb, and Chloe

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Firstly, I want to thank my family for their love, support, and encouragement. I especially want to express my deepest gratitude to my husband whose unconditional support and encouragement kept me writing. Secondly, I want to thank the committee for their patience and assistance. This project would not have been completed without the generous support and guidance from Jane Danielewicz, my director. I would like to thank Dan Anderson for giving me the idea for this project as well as for his diverse contributions as the chair and reader. My gratitude to Jordynn Jack for reading through my early drafts and for her awesome feedback. I would like to thank Ruth Salvaggio for wonderful advice throughout the years. Lastly, I am indebted to Ashley Lucas for the meticulous attention she paid to my work and for sharing her passion for the field of prison scholarship and activism with me. Lastly, I want to relay my heartfelt gratitude to all my friends at UNC whose moral support and encouragement I couldn't have done without.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Arts-in-Prison Movements.....	4
CHAPTER TWO: “WE SHALL HAVE OUR MANHOOD”: THE RHETORIC OF BLACK MASCULINITY IN ELDRIDGE CLEAVER’S <i>SOUL ON ICE</i>	15
Cleaver’s Exploration of Black Masculinity Through the Outlaw	19
Cleaver’s Confrontation of the Trauma of Lynching and the Myth of Buck the Rapist	23
Cleaver’s Confrontation of the Trauma of Lynching and the Figure of Uncle Tom	29
The Confession: Cleaver’s Rhetoric of Violence	35
Cleaver’s Search for Redemption Through the Black Jeremiad.....	40
CHAPTER THREE: “THE ILLUSION OF OTHERNESS”: THE RHETORIC OF NEWS-WRITING IN MUMIA ABU-JAMAL’S <i>LIVE FROM DEATH ROW</i>	52
The Free Mumia Movement: Mumia Abu-Jamal and His Case	53
“From the Valley of the Shadow of Death”: Mumia Abu-Jamal’s <i>Live from Death Row</i>	56
The Ideological “Black Hole” Function of Prison: Rhetorical Constraints of Prison Writers	61

“From Death Row, This is Mumia Abu-Jamal”: The Use of Investigative Reporting and the Invention of the Real	69
“A Violation of Ordinary Principles of Humanity”: The Use of Human-Interest Stories and the Invention of the Everyday	78
CHAPTER FOUR: “MY JOURNALS, POEMS, AND WRITINGS ARE HOME”: THE RHETORIC OF BELONGING IN JIMMY SANTIAGO BACA’S <i>A PLACE TO STAND</i>	84
Chicano Ex-Convict/Writer/Activist Jimmy Santiago Baca.....	85
Chicano Experience in the Borderlands.....	87
“Stain on Their Illusion of a Perfect America”: The Chicano as a Bordered Subject.....	92
“School Wasn’t Anything I Expected”: The Bordering Practice of National Literacy Pedagogy	101
“I Wrapped Myself in This Cocoon of Language”: Transcending the Walls of Prison	109
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	115
WORKS CITED	124

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Although in recent years, prison writings have become more visible, in part due to the recent boom in the memoir publishing industry, they still remain largely a neglected area of study in academia. For example, H. Bruce Franklin has long argued for the need to examine prison as a significant site of literary production. In his well-known 1978 work, *Prison Literature in America*, Franklin gestures to the vastness of “prison literature” and mentions important figures who had been imprisoned dating back to the classical writers such as Socrates, Boethius, Villon, Thomas More, Cervantes, Donne, Bunyan, Defoe, Voltaire, Diderot, Thoreau, Melville, Oscar Wilde, Jack London and Dostoevsky. Most important, he points out how “the literature emerging today from the prisons of America constitutes an unprecedented phenomenon” and that studying these text would “lead to fundamental redefinition of American literature, its history and the criteria appropriate to evaluating all literary works” (233, xxix).¹ In his valuable bibliography of prison writers, *American Prisoners and Ex-Prisoners: Their Writings*, there are over 750 published works by prison writers. Similarly, in arguing for more studies of prison writing, B.V. Olguin writes, “With the largest prisoner population in the world, the United States has become the prime incubator of prison literature, a multigenre corpus that is larger than any other tradition and trend in the canon of American literature” (70). Of the multi-genre corpus, it is interesting to note that life-writing and/or personal-writing by prison writers is what that often makes the journey to the bookstores. There have been fiction prison writers like Chester Himes,

¹In this work, Franklin makes the important historical connections between contemporary prison literature to the African-American slave songs and narratives.

Malcolm Braly, Piri Thomas, Donald Goines, and Robert Beck and poets like Etheridge Knight, Jimmy Santiago Baca, Raul Salinas, and Ricardo Sanchez. However, by far, the most published genres in prison writing are autobiographies, memoirs, and personal essays/letters. For example, since the 1960s, a period that Bruce Franklin calls the prison renaissance, some of the most widely known works and/or mentioned works in scholarly studies are Malcolm X's, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965),² Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* (1968), George Jackson's *Soledad, Brother* (1970), Robert Beck's *The Naked Soul of Iceberg Slim* (1971), Rubin "Hurricane" Carter's *The Sixteenth Round* (1974), Angela Davis's *Angela Davis: Autobiography* (1974), Malcolm Braly's *False Starts: A Memoir of San Quentin and Other Prisons* (1976), Jack Henry Abbott's *In the Belly of the Beast: Letters from Prison* (1981), Jean Harris's *Marking Time: Letters from Jean Harris to Shana Alexander* (1991), Mumia Abu-Jamal's *Live from Death Row* (1995), Leonard Peltier's *Prison Writings: My Life is My Sun Dance* (1999), and Jimmy Santiago Baca's *A Place to Stand* (2001). Assata Shakur's *Assata: An Autobiography* (2001), and Piper Kerman's *Orange is the New Black* (2011). The most recent example, Piper Kerman's *Orange is the New Black*, has been enormously popular and has been made into a long-running TV show. Kerman's prison memoir is a good example of the ways in which prison writings have become more visible in the recent years. Since the successful publication of her memoir, Kerman has been a spokesperson for prison activism, speaking on behalf of prisoners and raising public awareness about issues such as solitary confinement and racism in prison.

This study offers rhetorical criticism of contemporary non-fiction life-writing/personal-writing from prison. Rhetorical criticism is the study of "how people within specific social

²Although the book is entitled autobiography and told in the first-person, it isn't a conventional autobiography. Written by Alex Haley, it is based on stories told to Haley by Malcolm X.

situations attempt to influence others through language” or “how particular rhetorical episodes are persuasive” (Selzer 281). In rhetorical criticism, texts are analyzed as rhetorical moments—not simply as artifacts of art—and put in specific social circumstances of its production. For example, Selzer suggests “rhetorical analysis proceeds from a thick description of the rhetorical situation that motivated the item in question. It demands an appreciation of the social circumstances that call rhetorical events into being and that orchestrate the course of those events” (292). In my work, I read prisons writings as rhetorical moments of writers who share the situation of imprisonment. In other words, instead of examining prison writings for their literary and formal characteristics, I examine how they emerge from and speak to the social and material situation of imprisonment.

In prison, writing is one way that the incarcerated empower themselves in a place designed to rob them of control. On the one hand, writing can provide the incarcerated a means to understand their ordeals and find hope. It can also be a practice that affords them a sense of freedom where there is none. On the other hand, writing, like all other activities in prison, is monitored and censored. In prison, direct and indirect censorship operate as methods of exerting control over the incarcerated. This study attempts to delve into the various social actions and constraints of prison writing. In trying to contextualize prison writings in their immediate surrounding, I consider the following questions: What constraints did these writers share in writing these memoirs? What were some ways that these writers responded not only to the physical isolation of imprisonment but also the social constraints of being incarcerated? One constraint that I identify in this study is the prison-specific practice of life-writing as personal therapy, which I describe using the works of prison scholars such as Ashely Lucas, Sadie

Reynolds, Tobi Jacobi, and Simone Weil Davis as well as the statement goals of arts-in-prison programs.

ARTS-IN-PRISON MOVEMENTS

Some of the obvious constraints stem from the institutional restrictions and lack of resources in prison that often make it hard for prison writers to engage in sustained writing. Such problems are explicitly voiced by Eldridge Cleaver and Mumia Abu-Jamal who have addressed the difficulties of acquiring a typewriter or books in prisons. However, there are also subtler forms of constraints that stem from the disjunction that exists in the perception and the practice of prison writing, especially life-writing, a popular genre in the creative writing classes that were historically offered with the goal of rehabilitating the incarcerated.

Historically, it was a common practice in arts-in-prison programs to offer creative writing classes with the goal of rehabilitating the incarcerated. The arts-based programs in prison were immensely popular in the latter half of the twentieth century as a way to “promote desistance from crime” and/or “lower recidivism rates” (Cheliotis and Jordanosk 1; Bernstein 79). For example, during the 1960s and 70s, a trend in reformist penology saw a proliferation of prison programs backed by federal and state governments along with major nonprofit agencies. In a study of American prison culture, *America is the Prison: Arts and Politics in Prison in the 1970s*, Lee Bernstein notes that by 1982 350 programs were operating in forty-five states (77). Some major initiatives during this period included the Arts Creative Writing Program by The New Jersey State Council in 1972, the Artists in Social Institutions Program by California Arts Council in 1976 (becomes Arts-in-Corrections in 1981), the Writer’s Workshop at the Arizona State Prisons by the Commission on the Arts and Humanities in 1973. The PEN American

Center's Prison Writing Program along with the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition's Prison Arts Program were launched during this period of reformist penology.

In the United States, the early 1980s marked a punitive turn in prison culture and brought about a drastic decline in prison reform efforts. Coupled with the decline of rehabilitative discourse in the 1980s and the increase in tough-on-crime legislation, the arts-in-prison programs drastically declined in number during this period. However, in progressive Western countries like the United Kingdom, the arts-in-prison movement continued to thrive with the belief that the arts could rehabilitate convicts in prison. According to a report by the Unit for the Arts and Offenders and the Centre for Applied Theatre Research, 400 arts-in-prisons projects, which consisted of visual arts, film, theatre, creative writing, dance, and music, were offered in 2003 in the UK to inmates as "self-development" programs.

In these "self-development" programs, there existed a tendency towards seeing the incarcerated as "sick" and in need of rehabilitation. The benefits to the incarcerated were claimed to be "valuable communication skills and new-found confidence as well as gaining a means of positive self-expression ... [which will hopefully] lead to changes in behavior and attitudes ... and strengthen relationships" (7). In the instruction of creative writing, the rehabilitative discourse was even more clearly visible. It claimed that the practice of writing helped to "challenge the value system of offenders":

The model of change identified in descriptions of creative writing/words/storytelling practices within the criminal justice system focuses on an individual's capacity to use language to describe complex emotional experience, leading to increased social, moral and emotional awareness and improved management/regulation of self. (Hughes 67)

The potential for self-development in "writing/words/storytelling practices" was identified as the "capacity to use language"; however, the goal was ultimately specified as the "social, moral, and

emotional awareness and improved management/regulation of self.” On the one hand, these creative writing programs were beneficial to the inmates in providing them with valuable access to learning and opportunities to connect with the outside world; on the other hand, however, the narrowly-tailored goal ultimately emphasized the therapeutic role of writing.

During the 1960s and 1970s in the U.S., prison creative writing programs specifically used the argument about the therapeutic function of writing as a way to endorse their programs and, in part, the rehabilitation discourse in their endorsement had to do with the difficulty in persuading the public for the support of these writing programs. One sure way to acquire governmental and prison cooperation was to claim that creative writing can reduce crime by rehabilitating the incarcerated, helping them to confess, reform, and better manage their emotions and relationships. For example, in the summary of the goals of the PEN Prison Writing Program, one of the longest running arts-in-prison programs, the function of creative writing was envisioned to:

- bear witness,
- resist institutionalization,
- know oneself or come clean,
- sustain relationships and recover feelings,
- resist racism and cross cultural barriers,
- use as an alternative to violence, and
- live in the face of death. (Hindshaw and Klarreich 141)

Although the goals sought to address the needs of the inmates in many ways, the descriptions were narrowly defined to the therapeutic. At the same time, the arguments for the writing programs pointed to the heightened sense of empowerment that writing affords the incarcerated. We see that the aim was to provide much needed space for self-affirmation to those who faced the daily threat of oppression and even death, and, as such, sought to help the inmates resist the oppressive conditions of imprisonment. In other words, the writing served not only as a vehicle

through which the incarcerated could “come clean,” “recover feelings,” and “sustain relationships,” but also, most important, to “resist institutionalization” and “live in the face of death” (Hinshaw and Klarreich 141). Thus, on the one hand, the goals of the PEN Prison Writing Program endorsed writing as a way to *do* time “with dignity, respect for others, and some measure of independence ... growth and transcendence” (Chevigny xxii). On the other hand, the goals emphasized the role of writing in establishing one’s sense of responsibility to society as well. For example, the then Pen Writing Program Chair, Kathrin Perutz, argued for prison writing programs by emphasizing the role of writing in establishing one’s sense of responsibility: “To be able to say what you mean, to put in words what you perceive as truth, to impose form on the formless—this is a way to reconstruct a life, to restore one’s sense of meaning, of responsibility to oneself and to others” (*Doing Time* xvii).

As such, the PEN Prison Writing Program defined the practice of writing as serving specific needs and purposes of the incarcerated. The specific prison-setting of the writing programs meant that they were conducted differently from the writing workshops and classes on the outside. Thus, for prison writers, who often learned to read and write within these program settings, the act of writing, especially life-writing, entailed expectations about its content and even form that aren’t imposed on writers on the outside. For instance, Ashley Lucas points out that arts-in-prison “is explicitly characterized as and valued for qualities that are therapeutic” and seen as a way “to urge [the incarcerated] toward personal transformation and reform, often through the process of recounting—either literally or representationally—their past misdeeds and then professing remorse” (135). She argues that the prisoner artists themselves come under scrutiny as objects to be examined in addition to the artifice of art. In other words, the idea of art being a free medium of expression doesn’t apply to prison artists. Such arguments for “prisoner-

as-artist” are helpful in further exploring the problems in rehabilitative writing programs.

Although these creative writing programs in prison are politically progressive and humanitarian, in practice, the overt emphasis on the therapeutic role of writing can be problematic in the setting of prison. Ultimately, depending on the ways in which the writing programs are conducted, the writing activities can translate to confessing one’s guilt, which can be oppressive to the inmates in the workshop. It can also be dangerous in prison where one’s crime isn’t openly shared.

Also, therapeutic writing aimed at confessing one’s guilt reinforces the view of prison writers seen only through the prism of their juridical guilt. For example, specifically referring to prison women writers, Simone Weil Davis criticizes the “feminizing slight” of the tendency to construe the writings of women as merely “confessional” (208-9). Because to “write as an incarcerated woman is to write into the implicit assumption of predetermined guilt and an oft-reiterated obligation to rehabilitate on paper” (209). She argues that even “with therapeutic writing designed to confront trauma,” prison writing programs ought to “challenge the assumption that when women reveal themselves through writing, their story must necessarily follow the conventions of either the confession or recovery narrative (206). Similarly, Ashley Lucas argues for the need to see inmates in prison workshops as prisoners-as-artists. In conducting workshops, Lucas argues that it is important to “[convince] both the incarcerated artist and the audiences of her work that prisoners can hone their craft and create in as refined, imaginatively expansive, experimental, /or intellectual a way as any free world artist” (135-6).

One of the problems with narrowly defining writing or art practices as therapy is that it can further lead to robbing the inmate’s sense of agency and control of their lives. The problem in the construction of deficiency in the rehabilitative discourse itself is noted by prison writing facilitators and scholars such as Sadie Reynolds and Tobi Jacobi. For example, in “Good

Intentions Aside, The Ethics of Reciprocity in a University-Jail Women's Writing Workshop Collaboration," Reynolds argues that rehabilitative discourse operates under the assumption that the incarcerated is ill or deviant. She writes, "A major flaw in the notion of rehabilitation as commonly conceived is that it implies deficiency; educational programs based on this model are grounded in a perception of prisoners as inherently defective" (100). In the article, she argues against the deficiency model of rehabilitation and claims that "good intentions aside," the prison program facilitators or instructors should not approach the incarcerated with the attitude that they are there to save or cure the incarcerated. Similarly, in her edited anthology on prison pedagogy, Jacobi also argues for a body of work that "interrogates romantic notions of the writing teacher or workshop facilitator as transformative agent or savior" (3). She argues that, although the writing programs provide the incarcerated opportunities and space for personal development through educational and communal activities, these programs must be further interrogated because they are "fraught with potential complicities [where] teachers risk affiliation with hierarchical, oppressive social structures" (Jacobi *Contraband Literacies*, 5). Thus, in prison, the act of writing is narrowly defined to the confines of the goals of personal rehabilitation and therapy. However, as I will show, writings produced by prisoners are highly rhetorical works that protest not only the social definition of prison writing but also the larger social issues of the modern penitentiary.

In this dissertation, I analyze three commercially successful prison writings of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century as case studies, namely Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* (1968), Mumia Abu-Jamal's *Live from Death Row* (1995), and Jimmy Santiago Baca's *A Place to Stand* (2001). Each of these three texts were specifically chosen because they involve social movements and activism. For example, *Soul on Ice* is known as the text that played a pivotal role

in the California prison insurgency during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Eric Cummins argues that it served as a catalyst for the “radical convict resistance movement inside the prison walls” (vii). *Live from Death Row* was the focus of a minor controversy that involved the prisoner’s right to free speech. *A Place to Stand* was an important part of Baca’s prison activism raising public awareness about the need for literacy programs in prison. I argue that in addition to telling experiences of imprisonment, these are highly rhetorical and reader-oriented texts that explicitly engage contemporary public discourse about prison and, in some cases, serve as the means by which these writers generated social movements, raising public awareness about the various injustices of prison.

The first chapter is on Eldridge Cleaver, an African-American writer and activist of the late 1960s and early 70s, who is best remembered as the Minister of Information of the Black Panther Party during the height of the Black Power movement. As one of the leaders of the Black Panther Party, he worked next to Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and Kathleen Neal Cleaver (who is his ex-wife) and helped to establish the party as a national organization during this period. Cleaver is a controversial figure who once called “the essential stylist of black generation” and “a leading black spokesman of the day” came under criticism for his radical (and erratic) politics during the 1970s. At the height of his fame in 1968, Cleaver was a radical black nationalist espousing confrontation and violence as a form of protest. However, after returning to the United States from his 7-year-exile in 1975, he had become a born-again Christian and renounced once revolutionary left-wing black nationalist politics.

The chapter examines *Soul on Ice*, a collection of essays that he wrote while imprisoned for 8 years from 1958 to 1966. By incorporating both personal confession and civic rhetoric, Cleaver pushes the boundaries of the personal writing form in this prison writing. This is most

visible in the way that the memoir is comprised of multiple forms including epistolary, allegorical narrative, and traditional black protest oratory. Through these other forms, Cleaver moves his writing beyond the personal and speaks to both black and white readers about the problem (and misperceptions) of black criminality. Specifically, I identify three main rhetorical strategies: outlaw ethos, the rhetoric of violence, and the rhetoric of redemption. The first two sections of this chapter is a discussion of Cleaver's outlaw ethos visible in his confession of having been a rapist through which he relays to both black and white readers the trauma he experienced as a black man in America. In the third section, I identify the cruel and violent confession of rape as an intentional act of violence against white readers. Then, in the last section, I argue that Cleaver attempts to move beyond the violence he perpetuates in the earlier parts of the book by drawing on the tradition of black jeremiad, a form of rhetoric based on the notions of faith, unity, and progression. Cleaver's last essay, "To All Black Women, From All Black Men" is an example of how he seeks personal redemption as well as call on other black men to transcend the cycle of violence and to move toward rebirth and freedom.

The chapter identifies and analyzes the divergent rhetorics Cleaver employs in the book; ultimately however, I argue that Cleaver's rhetorics are problematic in the ways they reinforce—rather than reinvent—the existing stereotypes of the violent black criminal. Although he strives to reconcile the confessed violence of his past, he ends up repeating the historical and traumatic circumstances he expresses his desire to overcome. Situated historically, *Soul on Ice*, is a work illustrative of the radical black nationalist politics as well as the various excesses of the turbulent period of the late 1960s. In the prison writings of the late twentieth century, *Live from Death Row* and *A Place to Stand*, demonstrate an effort to address the problems that are not reconciled

in *Soul on Ice*. In both texts, Abu-Jamal and Baca invent rhetorical strategies that are community-oriented and more importantly, ethically-responsible.

Mumia Abu-Jamal is an African-American death row inmate who was instrumental in raising public awareness about the inhumanity of capital punishment as well as the injustice of racial violence in the U.S. criminal justice system. Convicted of murdering a police officer, he was sentenced with the death penalty in 1981 in a highly controversial case. Since his conviction, he has protested his innocence and has become a symbol of racial inequality and injustice in the criminal justice system. Currently, he is imprisoned in Mahanoy State Correctional Institution in Pennsylvania since the state commuted his death sentence. This change since 2001 is in large part due to what is popularly known as the free Mumia movement, which generated numerous documentaries, books, benefit concerts, street protests, and fund-raising activities and garnered international support against his execution.

In the chapter entitled “‘The Illusion of Otherness’: Community, Black Holes, and News-Writing in Mumia Abu-Jamal’s *Live from Death Row*,” I provide an analysis of his 1995 book, which argues for a radical reconceptualization of the law, the prison, and the criminal justice system. He reveals that what is upheld to be infallible, objective, and neutral is in fact subject to political trends and prejudice. I argue that Abu-Jamal’s rhetoric of news-writing draws on journalistic techniques, more specifically, investigative reporting and human-interest stories, which enable him to make visible the obscured space of prison, the phenomenon described by Angela Davis as the “black hole.” Throughout much of the book, Abu-Jamal positions himself as a critical on-looker as well as an active participant of the community he rhetorically creates in his journalistic pieces. Instead of as a stigmatized criminal, he rewrites his authorial position as a journalist inside the gates of an unseen community.

The last chapter entitled “‘My Journals, Poems, and Writing Are Home’: Borderland, Literacy, and Belongingness in Jimmy Santiago Baca’s *A Place to Stand*” is an analysis of Jimmy Santiago Baca’s 2001 prison memoir. Out of the three works, *A Place to Stand* is the most conventional prison writing in terms of its transformative and rehabilitative narrative. It is a memoir that tells of Baca’s personal journey from being illiterate to becoming a poet and writer while serving his five-year sentence at a maximum security penitentiary.

Baca is now a prisoner-turned-artist whose creative endeavors have served his life-long activist work. Baca is deeply invested in social concerns including prison reform, gang violence, literacy, immigration, and themes that deal with Chicana/o working-class communities. His work in activism involves teaching literacy and creative writing in and out of prison for over thirty-years. Since 2005, he has also founded Cedar Tree Inc., a nonprofit organization that employs ex-convicts and has produced two documentaries *Clamor en Chino* and *Moving the River Back Home*. Baca is now a celebrated Chicano poet who has received numerous prestigious awards and had his works made into a movie, play, and pedagogy book, *Adolescence on Edge: Stories and Lessons to Transform Learning*.

In *A Place to Stand*, Baca uses what I call a rhetoric of belonging, which draws on Chicano civic protest traditions in order to argue against prison as a psycho-socially bordered space. According to Baca, prison is not only a geographically separated and bordered place but also a psycho-social condition analogous to the dispossession and alienation experienced by the Chicano citizens in the borderlands. Such a portrayal gestures to a different conception of freedom from imprisonment, one that depends on a sense of belonging. His search to belong in a family, community, and nation points to the problem of what is called the “revolving door” of prison, the failure of the modern penitentiary in reforming its inmates.

Baca also endorses memoir-writing as an act that can transcend the conditions of incarceration and invent “a place to stand” for the incarcerated. Memoir-writing allows Baca to imagine himself out of the walls of his bordered existence as well as create a sense of belonging. More specifically, he shows that creating a sense of belonging is what allows him to transcend the psychosocial effects of incarceration. In my analysis, his conception of memoir-writing undercuts the notion of rehabilitation as a solitary activity. Although the memoir exhibits strong elements of therapeutic writing, it complicates the rehabilitative discourse underlying life-writing practices of prison. Baca’s assertion of writing is for a practice based on communal belonging and acceptance, not a solitary act of reform through confessing one’s guilt.

Thus, these three texts as particularly visible works of social protest serve as examples of the ways in which prison writings have pushed the limits of the personal, especially the perception of prison writing as works of personal reflection. These works make visible the social and rhetorical landscapes of prison. Writing from the most socially marginalized location, they were forced to invent innovative rhetorical strategies, the rhetoric of black masculinity, news-writing, and belonging respectively, in order to speak out from the walls of their cells and make visible the obscured nature of their incarcerated condition.

CHAPTER TWO: “WE SHALL HAVE OUR MANHOOD”: THE RHETORIC OF BLACK MASCULINITY IN ELDRIDGE CLEAVER’S *SOUL ON ICE*

During his early life, Eldridge Cleaver struggled with poverty and domestic violence at home and was in and out of jail throughout his adolescence. Roughly from 1954 to 1957, he had gone to prison convicted of a felony charge for selling marijuana. Only a year after his release, he was convicted with a more serious charge of assault and subsequently served the next eight years in San Quentin and Folsom prisons. While in prison, Cleaver smuggled his work out as legal correspondence through Beverly Axelrod, who was also the lawyer who helped him publish his writing. Despite having been largely illiterate before going to prison, Cleaver’s natural talent as a writer caught the attention of Axelrod who he had contacted for help from prison by a letter. Axelrod helped Cleaver get in touch with prominent writers such as Edward M. Keating, Norman Mailer, and Maxwell Geismar who then campaigned for Cleaver’s early parole (Cleaver K xiii). In December 1966, Cleaver was released from prison and worked as a reporter at the radical magazine *Ramparts* where he had published his first article. Soon thereafter, *Soul on Ice* was published in 1968.

Soul on Ice is a collection of essays Cleaver wrote while imprisoned in San Quentin and Folsom prisons in the 1950s and ‘60s. When it was released, it was a publication success, selling more than a million copies and effectively launching Cleaver’s career as a writer and an activist (Rout 62). The book was praised for its “unsparing, unaccommodating, tough, and lyrical” language and given the prestigious *New York Times* Book of the Year Award (*Soul on Ice* back

cover). For several years, it was a cultural phenomenon, especially amongst the New Left. Kathleen Rout, Cleaver's biographer writes, "In its day, *Soul on Ice* was considered the 'Red Book' of the new American revolution, as Chairman Mao's was for China" (40). Largely due to the success of the book, Cleaver's rise in fame roughly between the years 1968 to 1970 was exponential, leading to Cleaver travelling the country giving talks and interviews. For example, in 1968, the same year as the publication of the book, Cleaver was nominated as a presidential candidate on the ticket by the radical left-wing Peace and Freedom party, based in California.

In *Soul on Ice*, Cleaver gives a personal—and highly controversial—account of his crimes, multiple rapes that he perpetuated against, first, black women and second, white women. In what can only be construed as an intentionally brutal and callous admission, he confesses that he felt justified in his desire to make white society pay for the injustice perpetuated against black men. In this problematic admission, Cleaver presents not only himself but also other black men as dangerous fanatics whose quest for vengeance lead to "bloody, hateful, bitter, and malignant" crimes against humanity (36). This chapter examines this confession in the context of his arguments about black masculinity in the rest of the book. Seen as a part of his larger claims about black trauma, Cleaver's confession is rhetorically more complex and ambiguous than many early critics have made it out to be. The early critics such as Maxwell Geismer, Nat Hentoff, and Robert Scheer who praised his work as honest writing by an exceptionally articulate black criminal overlook what is essentially a self-destructive and nihilistic presentation of black masculinity in the book. Ultimately, I argue that Cleaver's prison writing is an exploration and critique of the self-destructive and nihilistic tendencies of the urban black male youths in the United States who are terrorized through state-sanctioned violence, imprisonment, and execution. In my analysis, Cleaver depicts himself as a violent rapist, i.e. outlaw, in order to

textually transmits to his readers the trauma and violence that mark the lives urban black male youths in the United States who suffer from the constant and palpable threat of death in their every lives. He shows this by exploring the two stereotypes of black masculinity, Buck and Uncle Tom, and presenting them to both black and white readers as emerging from racial traumas of lynching. As evidenced by Cleaver's following in the Black Panther Party, urban black youths who were becoming more militant in their protest considered the book, especially his professed outlaw status, a provocative exploration of racial experience. However, I believe that his efforts to speak out about the problems of black masculinity was only partly effective. Although he was able to generate a following for a short term, in the long run, the book's rhetorics—rape as vengeance, outlaw ethos, and violence (especially against women)—end up alienating his audience.

Divided into four parts, the book is an eclectic collection of essays, epistolaries, and fictive narrative. The book presents a psychosexual analysis of racism that Cleaver explores through alternating perspectives. Dissecting into what he calls the cultural neurosis or schizophrenia of American racism, Cleaver attempts to unpack and identify the pathology underlying interracial relationships, especially black men's relationships with white women. For instance, part two is a collection of essays on various social critiques of popular culture and politics including discussions on beatnik culture, the Vietnam War, Muhammad Ali, and James Baldwin in which he links his critiques of psychosexual politics of American culture with broader questions of economic and social equality for blacks. For instance, he asserts specific arguments about the national politics on race and exhorts his readers to mobilize for a racial revolution. In "Rallying Around the Flag," he asserts that "[what] the Negro now needs and consciously seeks is political and economic power" (143). He passionately calls for black

citizens to act: “The black people must be sure beyond all doubt that the reign of terror is ended and not just suspended, and that the future of their people is secure” (149). In arguing for racial equality, he forwards an important argument for the reclamation of black pride and identity. He argues that blacks must first recognize the ways in which they are socially construed as inferior:

One device evolved by the whites was to tab whatever the blacks did with the prefix “Negro.” The malignant ingeniousness of this device is that although it accurately describes an objective biological fact—or, at least, a sociological fact in America—it concealed the paramount psychological fact: that to the white mind, prefixing anything with “Negro” automatically consigned it to an inferior category. (103)

Throughout, he points out in a number of places the subtle ways in which both black men and women are made to believe in their inferiority. For example, he unequivocally claims, “a black growing up in America is indoctrinated with the white race’s standard of beauty” (29).

According to Cleaver, an important part of achieving political agency and thus, social equality is to find autonomy in their sense of identities from the various racial stereotypes or what Cleaver calls “social images” (220).

In part four, Cleaver further presents his theorization of various social images of black men and women through an allegorical narrative. Entitled “White Woman, Black Man,” the fictive allegory specifically delves into the psychosexual politics of miscegenation and traces various racialized social stereotypes of black masculinity and femininity to the times of slavery. The allegory describes the evolution of sexual pathology that the United States as a nation develops as a result of the enslavement of black men and women. Using archetypes such as “the Supermasculine Menial” and “the Amazon,” he attempts to re-historicize as well as decode for readers the psychosexual pathology of blacks. During the times of slavery, “the Supermasculine Menial” was “the personification of mindless brute,” the reduction of black men by pathological hypersexualization; “the Amazon” served as “the personification of the rejected domestic,” the

reduction of black women through desexualization (192; 218). “The Amazon” is the inverse of the ultra-femininity of white women and is “the woman on whom ‘dishpan hands’ seem not out of character” (218).

CLEAVER’S EXPLORATION OF BLACK MASCULINITY THROUGH THE OUTLAW

Cleaver was especially invested in the historical criminalization and lynching of black men and their effect on black masculinity. This is most evident in the extended analysis of black men’s identity throughout the book. Cleaver’s conception of black masculinity is most prominently explored through his own struggles with criminality in part one entitled, “Letters from Prison.” Part one includes a confession of rape as well as the description of his daily activities and encounters with inmates in prison. He writes that he became a rapist, a hateful extremist without a link to society or human sentiment. The narration chronicles his conversion to crime beginning from the time he is incarcerated, convicted of possession of marijuana at the age of eighteen, and his falling in with other black men who feel wronged by their imprisonment. This is the first time Cleaver serves serious time in prison, an experience that drives the rest of the narrative.

Cleaver’s understanding of what it means to be a black man in America is literally and metaphorically explored through the figure of a rapist, who he presents as a defiant (and traumatized) outlaw. He writes that during this earlier imprisonment is when he became a rapist desiring revenge against society: “I attacked all forms of piety, loyalty, and sentiment; marriage, love, God, patriotism, the Constitution, the founding fathers, law, concepts of right-wrong-good-evil, all forms of ritualized and conventional behavior” (24). Cleaver’s tirade is not only against white society, but also humanity, sentiment, and “any affirmative assertion” (24). He then writes that as a part of this tirade, he came to perceive the white woman as “The Ogre,” that he needed

to destroy (24). To Cleaver, a rapist is the ultimate outlaw, someone who not only breaks societal laws but also disavows all concepts of right and wrong and human decency. As a rhetorical strategy, his outlaw ethos allows Cleaver to take on the worst and the most extreme example of a criminal and to provoke his readers to consider the repercussions of racial incarceration and lynching. As a part of the “Evil of a day,” Cleaver raped women in his quest for vengeance against society:

Rape was an insurrectionary act. It delighted me that I was defying and trampling upon the white man’s law, upon his system of values, and that I was defiling his women—and this point, I believe, was the most satisfying to me because I was resentful over the historical fact of how the white man has used the black women. I felt I was getting revenge. (33)

Here, Cleaver’s cruel admission takes his readers into the dark terrain of psychological neurosis and trauma. In problematic ways, this passage is often cited as evidence of his uncompromising and defiant militancy as a black nationalist. However, it can also be seen as a commentary on the damage that racial incarceration and lynching inflict on black men. In places, Cleaver alludes to himself as the Ogre, a man on the cusp of losing his grasp of civilization, “[prancing] about, club in hand, seeking new idols to smash” (24). When released from prison, he, the rapist, is the Ogre emerging from the “midst of the foulest decay and putrid savagery” (40). The narrative, which begins with the minor drug infraction and ends with one of the worst crimes against humanity, can be seen as Cleaver’s probing into the different stages of dehumanizing he undergoes as a result of violence and terror enacted on black men through incarceration and lynching (which ironically is not unlike rape).

On the one hand, Cleaver’s confession of rape functions to negatively reinforce the black criminal stereotype; however, on the other hand, his discussion of rape, which is literal as well as metaphorical, puts his readers in an uncomfortable position to have to face what it means for

Cleaver, a black man, to be accused of and convicted of crime (especially rape). The exploration of black masculinity in Cleaver's confession is both problematic and revealing in the ways that some authors have represented black criminality in literature. For instance, Cleaver's nihilistic representation of black masculinity closely resembles another controversial depiction of black criminality by Richard Wright in *Native Son*. In the novel, Wright tells a story of a black male protagonist, Bigger Thomas, who gets sentenced to the electric chair for the murder of Mary Dalton, a white woman he inadvertently murders in a panicked state afraid that he would be accused of rape. Both Bigger and Cleaver are essentially dark and immoral figures whose depictions are in many ways complicit with the white racist view of black criminality, especially the stereotyping of black men as savage rapists. Not unlike Cleaver, Bigger is ultimately a caricature of a failed human being who out of fear commits crimes against other poor blacks like himself until he accidentally murders Mary, a daughter of a prosperous white family. Before Mary, Bigger is already guilty of raping and murdering Bessie Mears, his black girlfriend. After murdering Mary, Bigger feels no remorse and desires to boast about his gruesome crimes, coming to believe that he is invincible.

It is interesting to note the similarities in the two representations of black criminality in *Soul on Ice* and *Native Son*. Whereas Bigger is based on fiction and Cleaver isn't, black criminality represented through these two men is comparable. As I will elaborate, Cleaver's identity as a black male criminal is portrayed not only through the confession of his own crime as well as through fictive caricatures in later sections of his book. Specifically, black criminality is explored through the two racialized black stereotypes of black men, Buck and Uncle Tom, who are guilty of committing violence against both black and white women. Although the

motives are different, they are portrayed as morally culpable men whose pathological psychology find expression in acts universally considered cowardly amongst men.

In *Soul on Ice*, Cleaver implies that he sought insights into his identity as a black male criminal from *Native Son*: “It intensified my frustrations to know that I was indoctrinated.... It drove me into books seeking light on the subject. In Richard Wright’s *Native Son*, I found Bigger Thomas and a keen insight into the problem” (29). In both Wright and Cleaver’s provocative and revealing depictions of urban black male psychology, they raise important questions about what it means to be a black man in the United States. In *Native Son*, we see this in a pivotal scene when Bigger is in prison, convicted with the murder of Mary (but not the rape and murder of Bessie) and sentenced with death by electrocution. Wright depicts Bigger looking outward from the bars of his cell and seeing a shocking scene sprawled before his eyes:

He saw a black sprawling prison full of tiny black cells in which people lived; each had its stone jar of water and a crust of bread and no one could go from cell to cell and there were screams and curses and yells of suffering and nobody heard them, for the walls were thick and darkness was everywhere. (361)

This scene signals a moment of realization for Bigger who always saw other people as living a better life than he did. It would have fit the character of Bigger to envy the “free” people on the outside. Instead, he sees the same darkness and hopelessness of his imprisonment reflected in the lives of blacks. In this way, through the nihilistic figure of Bigger, Wright creates a symbol of imprisoned existence of blacks under the oppression of racism and uses it to consider the problem of black masculinity and criminality.

Similarly, in *Soul on Ice*, Cleaver’s conversion to crime is suggestive of the larger problems of black masculinity and criminality. Throughout the book, Cleaver probes into complex connections between the notions of black masculinity and criminality. Not unlike the figure of Bigger who comes to the realization of his imprisoned life after being sent to prison,

Cleaver writes that prison is where he comes to an understanding of “what it [means] to be black in white America” (21). Imprisonment is seen as “a continuation of slavery on a higher plane” providing him with keener insights into the oppression of blacks (22). At the same time, prison is also where Cleaver “[turns] away from America with horror, disgust, and outrage” and becomes a rapist and “astray ... from being human” (21; 34). Through the violent and nihilistic confession of his crime, Cleaver probes into the topic of black masculinity, criminality, and imprisonment in the context of “the varied ways in which poor urban black men in the United States are formed within, by, and against a culture of racial terror and state violence” (Ellis 6). In the following sections, I provide a discussion of the scholarly and historical discourse of black masculinity in order to further examine Cleaver’s rhetorics of the outlaw, violence, and redemption. Specifically, I situate Cleaver’s defiant black outlaw ethos in the historical emergence and development of racial stereotypes, specifically, Buck and Uncle Tom, and argue that he uses the figure of the outlaw as a symbol in which to explore the trauma that these stereotypes inflicted on black men.

CLEAVER’S CONFRONTATION OF THE TRAUMA OF LYNCHING AND THE MYTH OF BUCK THE RAPIST

According to contemporary scholarship on black masculinity, the criminalization of black men reaches back to the practices of lynching and the myth of black rapists dating back to the post-Civil war period. For example, scholars like Ronald L. Jackson II and Riché Richardson analyze racialized stock figures such as Uncle Tom, Coon, and Buck to argue that incriminating social stereotypes of black men have their roots in the historical development of the United States. Of the racialized stock figures, the stereotype of the criminal black man emerges out of Buck, a figure that construed the black man as a “brute.” Seen in characters like Gus in *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and Shaft in *Shaft* (1971), Buck is an example of how the notions of criminality

were inscribed on the bodies of black men through visual representations. In comparison to the comical Coon or the gentle Tom, Buck is depicted as “almost always a tall, dark-skinned muscular, athletically built character” (Jackson 42). According to Jackson, these depictions of Buck construed black men as being inherently ugly, violent, and immoral. Especially evident in the early twentieth-century works like *Birth of a Nation*, Buck is an ugly and immoral character who the audience finds deserving of punishment, even death. Jackson asserts that “the Black body of the brute was scripted to be nothing less than an indiscreet, devious, irresponsible, and sexually pernicious beast” (42).

In addition to the role that sexuality plays in the myth, what is apparent is the way that gender and race intersect in the construction of black criminality in the stereotype. For example, “The brute or buck’s primary objective was raping White women” (Jackson 42). Noting how the reconstruction era was a period when incidents of reported lynching were at their highest, Richardson suggests that the black rapist myth, which sanctioned the lynching of black men in the South, can be read as an act of dominance by white men who felt threatened by the recently “freed” black men post-Civil War:

White masculinity in the South was historically defined by such concepts as chivalry, honor, and gentility that were upheld as the most cherished principles and values in white southern social life. Their most perverse manifestations were patently evident after the end of slavery in sanctioning lynching and shaping the ideology of white supremacy that cast black men as rapists and stressed the necessity of defending and protecting the purity and sanctity of white womanhood. (5)

Richardson further explains that after having lost the war, the South went through a period in which it sought to reinvent the state’s sense of nationhood. She asserts that it was really this sense of anxiety over the status of Southern White nationhood (and manhood) that was projected onto the recently “freed” black men.

Historically, the emergence of the myth of the black rapist coincided with the violent practice of lynching. However, in numerous studies on lynching, scholars agree that the simultaneous emergence of the myth of the black rapist of white women during this period was largely a fiction, a sort of “fantasy” or “delusion” (White; Wells; Douglass; Davis; Richardson; Pinar; Harris; and Jones Royster). In *Gender of Racial Politics and Violence in America*, William F. Pinar aptly describes the “rape fantasy” not only as “a collective paranoid delusion” but also as “America’s National Crime” (63; 157). Similarly, referring to the falsity of the accusation, Riché Richardson associates the myth of the black rapist with a “white masculine pornographic imagination” (5). In reality, the cases of actual accusation of rape even in reported incidents of lynching were smaller than 29.2 % (Tolnay and Beck).

The emergence of the pernicious stereotype of black men as “perversely sexualized and pathological” deeply impacted African-American men (Richardson 6). An example can be seen in the 1894 essay entitled “Why is the Negro Lynched?” where Frederick Douglass whose appeal had depended on the moral authority of his speeches passionately argues against the pervasive myth. In the essay, Douglass vehemently protest against the accusations of rape as national lies that “paint [the black man] as a moral monster” (495). According to Douglass, the myth is so rampant and pernicious that even the sympathetic abolitionist white women expressed their concern for the southern citizens. In the essay, Douglass cites as an example Frances Willard of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union who expressed her concern thus: “The coloured race multiplies like locusts of Egypt. The safety of women, of children, of the home, is menaced in a thousand localities at this moment” (495). In the essay, Douglass also severely criticizes the practice of lynching and argues that it effectively casts black men outside the protection of the law. It was commonplace for both Northern and Southern whites to justify the practice of violent

lynching as a punishment that fit the immoral and heinous nature of the crime of rape. In the rhetoric of the lynchers during the period, the mob-administered, extra-legal, and inhumane punishment of lynching was justified: “[They] coded all that was wrong in the South by asserting the urgent need to defend their women and stop ‘black brutes.’ They believed that virtuous white women should see their evil attackers punished quickly and with finality” (Jones Royster 9). Through such rhetoric, the horrors of the mob-administered public torture and execution of black men were condoned. Thus, at the same time that the black rapist myth marred the already fragile ethos black male public figures like Douglass, the accusation of an unspeakable crime of rape was used in the rhetoric justifying yet another unspeakably violence of lynching.

According to scholars like Trudier Harris, both criminalizing myth and lynching worked hand-in-hand to effectively cast black men outside the sphere of public and civic participation. In *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals*, Harris writes that the highly public nature of lynching was all a part of the rhetoric that enacted the emasculation of black men:

Lynchings were carefully designed to convey to black persons in this country that they had no power.... Black males were especially made to feel that they had no right to take care of their families ... no rights to assume any other claims to manhood as traditionally expressed in this country. Lynchings became, then, the final part of emasculation that was carried out everyday in word and deed. (x)

As a “carefully designed” and spectacular act, lynching emasculated black men by causing physical and psychological trauma. By objectifying black male bodies in what was not only highly public but also violent acts that involved sexual abuse including castration, lynching functioned as a visual message, a threat, as well as a method of policing the black man’s body/desire via trauma.

In *Soul on Ice*, Cleaver situates his act of rape as emerging from the trauma of lynching and, at the same time challenges the white fantasy underlying the Buck stereotype. He confesses that he raped women as an act of vengeance, but this confession is couched in the larger narrative that traces the dissolution of his humanity he experiences in the lynching of black men. In other words, he attempts to problematize the act of rape by drawing an analogy with lynching. Leading to the confession of rape in “Becoming,” Cleaver gestures to the trauma he experienced from the lynching of Emmett Till, a 14-year-old black boy lynched in Mississippi for allegedly flirting with a white woman:

An event took place in Mississippi which turned me inside out: Emmett Till, a young Negro down from Chicago on a visit, was murdered, allegedly for flirting with a white woman. He had been shot, his head crushed from repeated blows with a blunt instrument, and his badly decomposed body was recovered from the river with a heavy weight on it. (29)

Here, Till’s mutilated and decomposed body “[turns him] inside out.” The pornographic white imagination that justified the lynching of the 14-year-old boy traumatizes Cleaver. Cleaver complicates the moment of trauma with the sighting of a magazine feature on the white women:

I looked at the picture again and again, and in spite of everything and against my will and the hate I felt for the woman and all that she represented, she appealed to me. I flew into a rage at myself, at America, at white women, at the history that had placed those tensions of lust and desire in my chest. Two days later, I had a nervous breakdown. (30)

Here, he harks back to the history of the policing of the black man’s body/desire, “the history that had placed... tensions of lust and desire” that leads to his rape-as-vengeance, a “sickness” of “bloody, hateful, bitter, and malignant nature” (36).

Thus, Cleaver confesses to the crime of rape represents an act by a traumatized man and at the same time uses his confession to expose the inhumanity of lynching. Cleaver’s justification

for rape is similar to the justification of lynching; in other words, both are acts of vengeance. More importantly, Cleaver infers that both are acts of violence justified as a matter of principle. Cleaver writes that he became a man of principle: “I began consciously incorporating [revolutionary] principles into my daily life, to employ tactics of ruthlessness in my dealings with everyone” (31). Here, although Cleaver is talking about his crime of rape, it harks back to the history of lynching that was also largely committed in the name of principle. He exposes the falsity in the logic of vengeance as an act of principle: “I did this consciously, deliberately, willfully, methodically—though looking back I see that I was in a frantic, wild, and completely abandoned frame of mind” (33). He implies that although vengeance is thought to be done out of principle, it is ultimately a crime done in a “completely abandoned frame of mind.” In Cleaver’s own admission of loss of humanity, both rape and lynching are exposed as unjustifiable acts against humanity: “I took a long look at myself and... admitted that I was wrong, that I had gone astray—astray not so much from the white man’s law as from being human” (34). He emphatically argues that hating and harming another out of principle is to “stray... from being human”: “The price of hating other human beings is loving oneself less” (34; 36). By juxtaposing his loss of humanity with becoming a principled man, he seemingly gestures to loss of humanity experienced by those who enacted and participated in lynching.

Also, he reminds the readers of the falsity of the white pornographic imagination of black desire for white women:

Many whites flatter themselves with the idea that the Negro male’s lust and desire for the white dream girl is purely an esthetic attraction, but nothing could be farther from the truth. His motivation is often of such a bloody, hateful, bitter, and malignant nature that whites would really be hard pressed to find it flattering. I have discussed these points with prisoners who were convicted of rape, and their motivations are very plain. (36)

Here, Cleaver argues against the white pornographic imagination, specifically the false notions that belie the Buck stereotype. The reduction of black men as pathological sexual predators is argued as being false. In the later part of the book, Cleaver further tries to subvert the stereotype in his love letters to Beverly Axelrod, a white woman with whom he forms an intimate relationship. In the letters, the importance of human connection is emphasized over a sexual one. He writes, "I share with you the awesome feeling of being on the verge of really knowing another person" (175). He argues that to connect to someone beyond the "fraudulent and pretentious" is challenging yet "beautiful": "Getting to know someone... is an ultimate, irretrievable leap into the unknown In human experience, only the perennial themes can move us to such an extent" (177; 176). He also emphasizes the dangers of stereotypes that work to divide them: "If ... we fantasize each other into distorted caricatures of what we really are, then when we awake from the trance and see beyond the sham and front, all will dissolve, all will die and transform into bitterness and hate" (177). Here, Cleaver gestures to his own capability to love a white woman on spiritual and human levels. In this way, Cleaver tries to recant his past crime of rape; however, although Cleaver writes that his crime was wrong, his provocative telling of that past is still questionable in its treatment of women.

CLEAVER'S CONFRONTATION OF THE TRAUMA OF LYNCHING AND THE FIGURE OF UNCLE TOM

Not unlike the Buck stereotype, Cleaver argues that the Uncle Tom figure also emerges from within the site of lynching. Throughout the book, Cleaver criticizes black men for their Uncle Tom ways and argues that the embodiment of Uncle Tom is not unlike the "revolutionary sickness" of the black rapist "[keeping] him perpetually out of harmony with the system that is oppressing him" (36). Uncle Tom is a black male figure whose trauma also leads to a sort of

death. By criticizing the self-destructive and nihilistic tendencies of the Uncle Tom figure, he calls on his black readers to confront the trauma of lynching.

In the allegorical narrative, “The Allegory of the Black Eunuchs,” Cleaver creates an archetype of the Uncle Tom figure that he interchangeably calls “the Lazarus,” “the Infidel,” and “the Accused.” Uncle Tom is the symbolically killed black man, the Lazarus; at the same time, he is the Accused because he is seen as a traitor, an Infidel, by the blood-thirsty and ignorant black bad man figures, Black Eunuchs: “Soon after we [the Black Eunuchs] seated, an old fat Lazarus ... sat down in the chair There was something in his style, the way he carried himself, that we held in contempt. We had him written down as an Uncle Tom” (184). In the allegory, Cleaver complicates Uncle Tom as well as the blood-thirsty black bad man by presenting them as both stereotypes and embodied figures.

As a stereotype, Uncle Tom represents “a socially acceptable Good Negro” character (Bogle 6). Largely characterized as being submissive, gentle, and loyal, Uncle Tom is the white fantasy of the good slave. Ironically, black civic leaders historically played on the white fantasy of the good slave Uncle Tom in order to humanize the recently freed blacks in the eyes of the white audience during the reconstruction era. A classic example is in “The Atlanta Exposition Address” (1895) in which Booker T. Washington uses the Uncle Tom figure in the “image of the faithful, long-suffering, honest slave” (Moses 53). He writes,

While doing this, you can be sure in the future, as in the past, that you and your families will be surrounded by the most patient, faithful, law-abiding, and unresentful people that the world has seen. As we have proved our loyalty to you in the past, in nursing your children, watching the sick-bed of your mothers and fathers, and often following them with tear-dimmed eyes to their graves, so in the future, in our humble way, we shall stand by you with a devotion that no foreigner can approach, ready to lay down our lives, if need be, in defense of yours.
(Washington 185-6)

On the one hand, this rhetoric is an appeal to blacks to get along peacefully with whites and to raise themselves out of their servile conditions through hard work and virtue. On the other hand, it is also a rhetoric that plays on the white fantasy of the submissive slave in anticipation of white retaliation against blacks during the reconstruction era.³ In the 1894 essay, “Why is the Negro Lynched?,” Frederick Douglass uses a similar rhetoric in anticipation of lynching of black men in the south. Specifically, Douglass exposes the falsity of the myth of the black rapist by arguing that it is a form of retaliation against the recently freed black men post-emancipation:

I reject the charge brought against the Negro as a class, because all through the late war, while the slave-masters of the South were absent from their homes, in the field of rebellion, with bullets in their pockets, treason in their hearts, broad blades in their bloody hands, seeking the life of the nation, with the vile purpose of perpetuating the enslavement of the Negro, their wives, their daughters, their sisters and their mothers were ‘left in the absolute custody of these same Negroes, and during all those long four years of terrible conflict, when the Negro had every opportunity to commit the abominable crime now alleged against him, there was never a single instance of such crime reported or charged against him. (756-7).

Here, Douglass avoids reinforcing the servile characterization of Uncle Tom. However, we see that in order to dissuade the whites of the criminalizing black rapist myth, he uses the slave figure of Uncle Tom who in the passage is loyal and ultimately unthreatening.⁴

³W.E. B. Dubois criticized Washington’s portrayal of the long-suffering black race in his classic text the *Souls of Black Folks*, in which he accuses Washington of “[representing] in Negro thought the old attitude of adjustment and submission” and “[accepting] the alleged inferiority of the Negro races” (38-9). Dubois felt that the Uncle Tom rhetoric deployed by Washington only served to perpetuate an injurious, submissive racial stereotype, which he argued ultimately functioned to condone the white suppression of the black race.

⁴In the twentieth century, Uncle Tom becomes a pejorative term to refer to black who are “sell-outs... abandoning black culture for whiteness” (Smitherman 252). For instance, during his black nationalist days, Malcolm X’s early accusations against Martin Luther King, Jr. is a classic example. Referring to King as a “twentieth century Uncle Tom,” Malcolm X felt that King’s moderate politics of racial integration was not only a sign of submission but also a form of betrayal to the black people. In his 1963 “Message to the Grassroots,” Malcolm X characterizes

According to black masculinity scholars, the Uncle Tom figure also functioned to domesticate and tame the threatening black male sexuality. According to Phillip Brian Harper, Max Robinson, the first black news anchor on U.S. network television, became successful by conforming “to the ‘rules’ of standard English language performance” and “impeccable image of bourgeois respectability,” which effectively functioned to “domesticate his threatening physicality”:

Max Robinson’s achievement of a professional, public position that mandates the deployment of a certain rhetoric—that of the news anchor’s attractive and telegenic person—thus also raised the problem of taming the threatening black male sexuality.... [The] acknowledgments of his articulateness... served to absorb the threat of his sexuality that was raised in reference to his physical attractiveness.... [It] also in attesting to his refinement and civility actually domesticated his threatening physicality.... (9)

The appearance of bourgeois respectability functioned to neutralize the threatening body of the black man. However, according to Cleaver, the embodiment of the Uncle Tom stereotype by the black men is problematic. Cleaver seems to argue that the Uncle Tom stereotype is equally problematic as the Buck stereotype. Not unlike the Buck stereotype, the pathologically desexualized Uncle Tom is yet another objectification of the black male body.

the Uncle Tom figure as the “house Negro” who lived better than the other field slaves during slavery:

The house Negroes—they lived in the house with master, they dressed pretty good, they ate good because they ate his food-what he left. They lived in attic or the basement, but still lived near the master, and they loved the master more than the master loved himself. They would give their life to save the master’s house—quicker than the master would.... (*Malcolm X* 10)

In this analogy, Malcolm X turns the altruistic and heroic slave figure into a sell-out who has exchanged his pride for his survival. In the passage, we can also hear Malcolm X’s early separatist politics informing his criticism of King who preached non-violence and love toward whites.

In the allegorical narrative at the end of the book, “Allegory of the Black Eunuchs,” Cleaver depicts Uncle Tom as a grotesque and pathological figure whose impotence against the whites had over time made him into a shell of a man, a Body without an essence. The allegorical narrative captures an interaction between four fictional characters, three blood-thirsty black bad man figures and an Uncle Tom.⁵ Cleaver narrates in the first-person as one of the black bad man figures whose hate toward the whites ultimately manifests in his unquenchable thirst for blood and revenge. In what is clearly hyperbolized depiction, the grotesque characters reveal themselves to be crude and immoral in the narrative that tells “the curious terms at which he [Uncle Tom] had arrived with the world” (36). It begins with the three blood-thirsty black bad man figures—symbolized as Eunuchs—accusing Uncle Tom for being a sellout, questioning him as to how he has managed to stay alive through the violent history of slavery and lynching when he, a black man, should have died. Uncle Tom, symbolized as a Lazarus, is ultimately portrayed as a shell of a man, someone who is all talk and no action, someone who is unable to get the respect of his woman, and someone who lets his friends die: “[He] was death on another black, although the white man had ripped off his whole existence, his whole race, he was always talking about what he would do if the white man ever did something to him personally” (184). He is portrayed as the embodiment of death itself, a man without a soul, a mind. When asked if he’s “ever hit a black woman,” Uncle Tom says, “I wish I had a nickel for every bitch whose ass I’ve put my foot in” (186). Although Uncle Tom’s cruel treatment of women is presented mostly as empty talk, it is nevertheless traumatic to listen to. At one point, even the hate filled bad man figures exclaim, “You old Lazarus. Everything you said was twisted, it was all dead and stinking,

⁵See John Robert’s *From Trickster to Badman: The Black Folk Hero in Slavery and Freedom* (1989) and Jonathan Munby’s *Under a Bad Sign: Criminal Self-Representation in African, American Popular Culture* (2011) for my usage of the term “bad man.”

it was all warped and out of joint, it was off cue, off center” (200). Both the black bad man and Uncle Tom figures are what Cleaver calls the Supermasculine Menial, “who has been robbed of [their] mind,” whose “struggle ... is for the emancipation of his mind (216). On the one hand, if the “revolutionary sickness” of the black bad man figure in “Becoming” manifests in becoming a man of principle who justified raping women as an act of vengeance, Uncle Tom figure’s sickness manifests in cruel and demeaning talk about women. Cleaver seems to say that both black bad man and Uncle Tom are problematic figures who are ultimately trapped in their traumas.

In his conception, the Uncle Tom figure is presented as emerging from the site of lynching. In the midst of the accusation, Cleaver has the three blood-thirsty black bad man figures read into a moment of silence by the Lazarus. In this silence, all the characters are reminded of the violent history of lynching:

A self-searching, inward-looking silence ensued. One thought of blood and guns and knives, whips, ropes and chains and trees, screams, night riders, fear, nightsticks, police dogs and firehoses, fire, wounds and bombs, old women in pain and young women defiled, lies, jeers, little boys frozen in their first heat and young men *destudded* and old men burnt out [sic]. (186)

Here, the allegory of the Lazarus who rises from death linked to slavery and lynching symbolizes the plight of all black men. Cleaver writes of the “terrible, terrible pain” of the same trauma of lynching reflected in Uncle Tom:

A cruel, wounded expression was in his eyes. I could see a pain there that was dreadful. It made me feel fear—not so much for the Infidel [Uncle Tom] as for myself, my generation, my contemporaries, because I was not sure that I, we, knew what to do or would learn before it was too late, and would be able to escape from feeling that same deep-seated pain some day, myself, ourselves. It seemed to me in that moment, and I knew that the same thought was running through the minds of my Eunuch contemporaries, that any fate, death, the gas chamber, the electric chair, a firing squad, heroin, suicide—anything would be better than to submit to the terrible, terrible pain which the Infidel had to learned to live with. (195)

Here, Cleaver traces a common history for both black bad men and Uncle Tom figures. Both emerge from the site of lynching (as well as the state-sanctioned execution) and are trapped in the unbearable trauma of that violent history. As I will elaborate later, Cleaver doesn't stop at exploring the figures. As we see in the above passage, he also gestures to the need for black men (and the whole nation) to become free of the trauma, "death, the gas chamber, the electric chair, a firing squad" (195). Similar to his confession of having become a rapist, he depicts extreme examples of pathological figures in this allegory in order to provoke his black readers to reflect on their painful history.

THE CONFESSION: CLEAVER'S RHETORIC OF VIOLENCE

In my reading, Cleaver's over-the-top language suggests that he purposefully creates the effect of violence through his writing. In "Becoming," in addition to the violence toward women (through rape) and black men (through the damaging representation), Cleaver also aims violent threats at white men in order to implicate them in the trauma of lynching and rape. For example, in the confession of rape in "Becoming," he quotes the lines of LeRoi Jones's poem: Come up. / Black dada nihilismus. / Rape the white girls. / Rape their fathers. / Cut the mothers' throats" [line breaks are added] (33). The callousness and the violence of the words are shocking and traumatizing. Although Cleaver writes that he "could not approve the act of rape" and "did not feel justified," he is seemingly unapologetic in his use of words like "white prey" to describe his victims. In the next line, Cleaver directly talks to his readers and although the narrator at this point is no longer the rapist, we still hear an echo of the violence:

I have lived those lines and I know that if I had not been apprehended I would have slit some white throats. There are, of course, many young blacks out there right now who are slitting white throats and raping the white girl. They are not doing this because they read LeRoi Jones' poetry, as some of his critics seem to believe. Rather, LeRoi is expressing the funky facts of life (34)

Here, in the unnecessary emphasis that rape represents the “funky facts of life,” there is a threat that functions as a performative enactment of violence, a threat, and vengeance against white readers.

Thus, to simply read his confession as a straight forward admission is to overlook the complexity of his writing, which replicates the violence of lynching and rape. Cleaver’s enactment of violence is a repetition of violence and as an effect of writing. According to Greg Forster, the representation of trauma in literature is insufficient in relaying what he calls “punctual” trauma, “historical events of such singularity, magnitude, and horror that they can be read as shocks that disable the psychic system” like the Holocaust, rape, lynching (259). Thus, he writes that certain texts draw their power from attempting “to transmit directly to the reader the experience of traumatic disruption”:

Critics deploying the category of trauma have stressed in particular the power of texts that seek less to represent traumatizing events—since representation risks, on this view, betraying the bewildering, imperfectly representational character of traumatic memory—than to transmit directly to the reader the experience of traumatic disruption. (260)

Through a similar mechanics ascribed to trauma narratives, Cleaver’s confession can be read as a direct transmission of the psychotic break and the violence born out of lynching. At the end of “Becoming,” he emphasizes his motive for his confession thus: “What must be done, I believe, is that all these problems—particularly the sickness between white woman and the black man—must be brought out into the open, dealt with and resolved” (34; 35-6). Cleaver points out that his admission constitutes more than a confession or a self-directed therapy and implies that his admission can potentially bring harm to himself:

It may be that I can harm myself by speaking frankly and directly, but I do not care about that at all. Of course I want to get out of prison, badly, but I shall get out some day. I am more concerned with what I am going to be after I get out. I know that by following the course which I have charted I will find my salvation.

If I had followed the path laid down for me by the officials, I'd undoubtedly have long since been out of prison—but I'd be a less of a man. (36)

Although Cleaver refers to the act of writing as a route to his “salvation,” a way to find his autonomous identity, he also clearly indicates that he is violating the expectations of a prisoner: “But I have a suspicion that... ‘free-normal-educated’ people rather expect me to be more reserved, penitent, remorseful, and not too quick to shoot off my mouth on certain subjects. But I let them down, disappoint them, make them gape at me in a sort of stupor” (38). Furthermore, Cleaver’s intentional enactment of violence can be detected in his admission that his confession will be hurtful to the readers:

I believe that in the experience of these men [convicted rapists] lies the knowledge and wisdom that must be utilized to help other youngers who are heading in the same direction. I think all of us, the entire nation, will be better off if we bring it all out front. A lot of people’s feelings will be hurt, but that is the price that must be paid. (36)

In these admissions, Cleaver indicates the potential harm that can come from his confession. Thus, we see that Cleaver’s confession is more than a simple admission of guilt; it is also a rhetorical act aimed at his readers. By shocking and offending his readers, he attempts to directly transmit to the readers his experience of trauma and violence.

Ultimately, although Cleaver attempts to justify his hurtful claims in the book as a rhetorical strategy, he overlooks the larger ethical implications and consequences of such violence. For instance, in the reviews of the book, there were vastly polarized claims about Cleaver’s politics. On the one hand, Cleaver’s supporters such as the intellectuals of the radical New Left, praised his book as a work by a genuine, honest, and innocent man. On the other hand, those whom Cleaver represents in his writing such as black women saw the work as a problematic text that potentially does more harm than good. Especially in the early reviews of

the late 1970s when the book was published, many critiques were problematic in their simplicity. For instance, in reference to the confession of rape, Maxwell Geismer exclaims that Cleaver shows a “kind of adolescent innocence—the innocence of genius” (*Soul* 14). In a *Saturday Evening Post* article, Cleaver is described as “the only genuine militant black extremist in the public eye” (Schanche 32). Similarly, in another review, Cleaver, despite his criminal and violent rhetoric, is praised for his articulateness:

[Cleaver is] the essential stylist of the new black generation, not only in the direct and irreverent manner in which he expresses feeling and attitude, but also in the way that those qualities mark his writing. To the militant black intelligentsia, Cleaver is *the kind of man* and the kind of writer who most clearly expresses them, what they want to say now to America, and how they want to say it. (Anderson 66)

In the reviews of the book, we see a slippage in what the reviewers are critiquing, the rhetoric or the man. In the preface to *Soul on Ice*, Ismael Reed most accurately explains the problem thus: “if they had read *Soul on Ice* instead of marveling at the fact that a black prisoner could hold such a gifted mind they would have learned that Cleaver’s most persistent intellectual quality is doubt” (*Soul* 6). Pointing out the deficiency in the earlier reviews of the book, Reed argues that Cleaver is far from innocent, honest, and genuine. In fact, referring to the tricky rhetoric, he likens him to the trickster figure in “African-Native American animal tales who use guile, wit, and flattery to accomplish their ends” (*Soul* 4). Although these critics at the time were in support of the causes of black men in prison and thus Cleaver, their attempts to portray Cleaver as a likeable character—notice the emphasis on innocence, honest, and genuine—may have done more harm than good. Their claims about Cleaver are not only based on narrow presumptions about what convicts are like, but it also disregards the implications of Cleaver’s portrayal of violence.

In *Black Macho and the Superwoman*, Michelle Wallace who takes Cleaver to task in his treatment of women in the text makes the argument that his rhetoric is motivated by “resentment of black women” and “envy of white men” and thus far from innocent (68). Rather, it is Cleaver using violence in order to take revenge on paper. She writes, “*Soul on Ice* was a book that appealed to the senses. Cleaver was violent and advocated violence. Cleaver was macho and the sixties were years in which macho heroism was highly exalted People yearned for the smell of blood on a page and Cleaver provided it” (67). By “appealing to the senses,” she implies that the book was not only far from being innocent but also a sensationalist piece that thrilled its readers with “blood.” Ultimately, Cleaver fooled “people of all sorts of political and intellectual persuasions” to cheer him on as they read the violent rape on the page.⁶ In her assessment, Wallace accurately points out how Cleaver’s rhetoric is like a double-sided sword. Although his text in many ways was a call for black men to fight racial injustice, it also did so at the expense of representing black men and women in injurious ways.

Thus, I believe Cleaver’s writing is an incongruous work in many ways because he addresses multiple readers with different motives. Cleaver himself struggles with the double-sidedness of his rhetoric making his book contradictory at times. This is especially visible in the later sections of his book where he deploys what I call a rhetoric of redemption. In the next section, I suggest that Cleaver’s writing mimics the black jeremiad defined by its structural progression from trauma/enslavement to healing/freedom. In addition to the confessional narrative, *Soul on Ice* includes epistolary and allegorical narrative as well as the black jeremiad.

⁶See Michelle Wallace and Jane Rhodes for their critiques of the Black Panther party. They argue that the emphasis on black masculinity during the Black Power movement was misogynistic and sexist and ultimately subordinated the needs of African-American women.

By drawing on the black jeremiad tradition, he charts a journey from hate and trauma to love and affirmation, i.e. rhetoric of redemption.

CLEAVER'S SEARCH FOR REDEMPTION THROUGH THE BLACK JEREMIAD

In *Soul on Ice*, Cleaver uses contrasting—and sometimes directly conflicting—approaches. At times, Cleaver uses informal black street vernacular; at other times, he also taps into more established modes of public speaking such as the black jeremiad, a traditional black oratory. In his use of the black jeremiad, Cleaver presents a different—as well as opposing—ethos from the earlier part of the book. As Peter Castor argues in his analysis of *Soul on Ice*, Cleaver attempts “to rupture the boundaries of skin color and prison walls, to act and write across lines of difference in terms of race and incarceration” (73). As I will show in this section, Cleaver draws from the progressive and integrationist impulses of the black jeremiad in order to craft a sort of a rhetoric of redemption, which calls on his black readers (and himself) to transcend the cycle of violence of their past.

In “The Enduring Black Jeremiad: The American Jeremiad and Black Protest Rhetoric from Frederick Douglass to W.E.B. Du Bois, 1841-1919,” Howard-Pitney defines the jeremiad as an important black protest tradition that was characterized by the belief that American Manifest Destiny would spread civic democracy and freedom. This civic oratory was politic-religious in form and thus preached social reform by issuing impassioned warnings of divine punishment and propagating the fulfillment of freedom as a theological prophesy. In charting the inevitable progression toward the messianic fulfillment, the form largely comprised of three parts:

The complete rhetorical ritual ... is comprised of three parts: citing of the promise, lamentation of present declension, and a prophesy of the promise's imminent fulfillment. The sacred promise is that within the New World history will lead inevitably toward perfection. The jeremiad's second component,

however, is its claim of contemporary declension from the promise. According to preachers of the jeremiad, God's people were not progressing but showed alarming signs of retrogression Because Americans were His chosen own, God punished them only to inspire them and hasten the fulfillment of their destiny. The jeremiad concluded, therefore, with the prophecy that God would mysteriously use the unhappy present to bring the people to repentance and, thus, move again towards fulfillment of their mission. (Howard-Pitney, "The Enduring" 482-3).

This structural progression, for example, can be seen in many of Martin Luther King's sermons.

In a quintessential black jeremiad, "I Have a Dream," King begins by citing the promise of freedom for blacks, then laments the long withheld promise, and ends by prophesizing the fulfillment of that promise. It is ultimately a rhetoric that draws on the power of faith, unity, and progression.

In *Soul on Ice*, Cleaver gestures to this tradition by deploying the three elements that comprise the black jeremiad. Although Cleaver's borrowing of the black jeremiad isn't overtly religious as King's sermons are, it is faithful to the integrationist and progressive vision of the future. For example, in "Rallying Round the Flag," Cleaver cites, laments, and prophesizes an inevitable black revolution. He begins, "Five years ago, even the most audacious visionary would not have dared predict the slashing do-or-die desperation ... which has exploded into our politics" (138). This beginning is reminiscent of "I Have a Dream," where King cites the promise of racial freedom in the beginning of the speech: "Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope" (1-2). The lamenting of the promise can be seen when King declares, "It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note" (6). But in the end, King expresses optimism in the fulfillment of the promise: "I say to you today ... I still have a dream" (21). In "Rallying Round the Flag," Cleaver cites the signs of revolution in the civil rights movement, then laments the lack of progress: "the

parapolitics ... was actually sluggish” in resolving the “problems which can no longer be compromised or swept cleverly under that national rug of self-delusion” (*Soul* 139). However, he ends by predicting an inevitable revolution to come: “America has come alive deep down in its raw guts, and vast contending forces of revolutionary momentum are squaring off in this land for decisive showdowns from which no one can purchase sanctuary” (139).

Also, the element of prophesy is an important part of the black jeremiad, and we see Cleaver’s deployment of ominous tones throughout the book: “We live in a system that is in the last stages of the protracted process of breaking up on a worldwide basis. The rulers of this system have their hands full. Injustice is being challenged at every turn and on every level” (147). In addition to predicting an inevitable revolution, he ominously laments the present state of American nation: “The America out of which Elijah Muhammad calls his people is indeed doomed, crumbling, burning, if not by the hand of God then by the hand of man (120). Here, he refers to the exclusively black messianic vision espoused in the Nation of Islam. Repeatedly, he reminds his readers of the danger of noncompliance: “A grave danger faces this nation” (136). He issues warnings of the imminent future to both black and white readers: “though you comb the ghettos of your desperate cities and beat the bushes of your black belt for another puppet who will succeed ... your search will be in vain. Because even as you search, you, yourself, are being changed, and you will understand that you must continue to change or die” (121). His declarations are bold and finite, predicting an eventual fulfillment of freedom for blacks: “ultimately we shall witness the merging of the Negro revolution” (143). Throughout, each essay ends with similarly declarations that gesture to the inevitable future where freedom and equality prevails over class and racial division.

In these ways, Cleaver draws from the black jeremiad form and charts a symbolic progression from trauma/enslavement to healing/freedom. If we see Cleaver's most traumatized and enslaved state in his confession of rape, then we see Cleaver's transcendence of trauma and recovery of freedom in the last essay, "To All Black Women, from All Black Men." In this homage to black women, Cleaver writes, "I have Returned from the dead. I speak to you now from the Here and Now. I was dead for four hundred years" (236). The homage itself charts the historical progression from trauma/enslavement to healing/freedom: "It is to be pondered and realized in the heart, for the heel of the white man's boot is our point of departure, our point of Resolve and Return—the blood stained pivot of our future" (237). Then, at the end, he crowns the black man and woman, King and Queen: "But put on your crown my Queen, and we will build a New City on these ruins" (242). This path from trauma/enslavement to healing/freedom is also a progression from hate to love. In the confession in the earlier part of the book, Cleaver is a hate-filled person; however, in this essay at the end of the book, he is a man professing love: "My Queen, it is hard for me to tell you what is in my heart for you today—what is in the heart of all my black brothers for you and all your black sisters—and I fear I will fail unless you reach out to me, tune in on me with the antenna of your love, the sacred love in ultimate degree" (238). Here, Cleaver gestures to the salvation of black men as resting on the recovery of love between black women and men. However, it also rests on subverting the two pathological stereotypes/figures of black masculinity: "I greet you, my Queen, not in the obsequious whine of a cringing Slave ..., neither do I greet you in the new voice, the unctuous supplications of the sleek Black Bourgeoise, nor the bullying bellow of the rude Free Slave—but in my own voice do I greet you, the voice of the Black Man" (236). Cleaver rejects both the black bad man and Uncle

Tom figures, at the same time, exhorts other black men to move toward the fulfillment of freedom/agency of the black jeremiad prophesy.

Most importantly, in Cleaver's conception, black jeremiad prophesy involves the healing/freedom of the black underclass. Cleaver's redemption rests on "the awakening into self-consciousness" of the incarcerated population of black men (*Soul* 82). In the above passage, the redeemed "voice of the Black Man" is autonomous and proud of his blackness. As I will show, Cleaver's deployment of black street vernacular can be seen as his rejection of the "sleek Black Bourgeoisie" embodied in the Black Jeremiah figure (*Soul* 236). According to Wilson Jeremiah Moses, in his influential work, *Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms: Social and Literary Manipulations of a Religious Myth*, it was common for black civic leaders to model themselves as a black Jeremiah figure, a sort of a Christian martyr or prophet in their speeches. Moses argues that it was a dominant form of leadership and mentions historical figures ranging from Father Divine to Daddy Grace to Prophet Jones to the larger-than-life symbol of altruism, Martin Luther King, Jr. (12-3). Until the twentieth-century, the pious and religious black Jeremiah orators were an important part of the black protest tradition affecting black civic leadership identity. Moses argues that it was only after American institutions opened their doors to black leaders for diverse and secular opportunities in public careers that black civic protest diverted from its religious foundations. The influence of black jeremiad can be seen in black civic protest throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century.⁷ Most notably, the black civic leaders like Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington heavily relied on the pious prophet-like public

⁷David Howard-Pitney picks up Moses's work and examines black Jeremiah figures from the nineteenth to twentieth century black civic protest and asserts that civic leaders such as Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Dubois, Mary McLeod Bethune, Martin Luther King, and even Malcolm X used the politico-religious tradition of black jeremiad.

image as an important part of their appeal. They were ex-slaves who had risen out of the horrors of slavery through the “qualities of kindness, patience, humility, and great-hearted altruism, even in the face of abuse” (Moses 49).

In his work, Moses traces the presence of the Uncle Tom figure in the documents and speeches of abolitionists. As far back as the pre-Civil War era, black civic leaders drew from the figure of Uncle Tom to establish their moral and religious authority in their black jeremiad speeches. In the twentieth-century, Martin Luther King, Jr. endowed Christian virtues to his black audience preaching against hatred and violence and exhorting them to love the white oppressors. According to David Howard-Pitney, King “artfully raised and used the popular stereotype associating African-Americans with Christ-like qualities of love, forgiveness, and nonviolence” like that of Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington:

[King’s] profound influence on American opinion, like that of Frederick Douglass before him was primarily rooted in moral authority. King and Douglass effectively marshaled the diverse but reinforcing cultural strands of evangelical Christianity, social reform, and civil religion in support of black’s crusade for equality. King rhetorically clothed the Civil Rights Movement in the sacred garb of the civil religion. (*The African* 149; 148-9)

Once referred to as a “twentieth-century religious Uncle Tom” by Malcolm X, King was often described as the quintessential black Jeremiah, the Christian martyr and prophet by many of his contemporaries. However, Cleaver clearly felt that this religious and conservative model of black jeremiad was constraining. Although he adapts the structure and the progressive and integrationist impulses of the tradition, he also veers away from the religious and conservative middle-class connotations of the tradition. Thus, Cleaver was closer to Malcolm X’s street style of oratory despite his use of King’s black jeremiad.

Unlike King, Malcolm X was notorious for his “daredevil swagger and bristling, defiant manner” (Howard-Pitney 167). He frequently offended his white audience by identifying them

“as the demonic cause of blacks’—and all non-white people’s woes,” and many blacks “admired his courage and got a vicarious thrill watching him fearlessly denounce whites for their depravity” (165; 167). In *Soul on Ice*, Cleaver writes of his indebtedness to Malcolm X. He idolized Malcolm X who came from similar working-class and ex-convict background as Cleaver. Similar to Malcolm X, Cleaver joins the Nation of Islam, a black-nationalist organization, during his imprisonment. It was the exposure to the Nation of Islam that led to his research into the topic of race and his development as a radical leftist. During this time, he read extensively on the topic of race and came to believe in the radical socialist ideology like Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Malcolm X, Frantz Fanon, Che Guevara, and Robert F. Williams. It was during this period in the Nation of Islam that Cleaver experienced a racial awakening and became politically active. However, Cleaver becomes largely secular in his politics, defecting from the organization at the time of Malcolm X’s change in his politics.

Not only in his hyper-masculine and outlaw persona he crafts in the book but also in his embracing of the black street (gangster) culture, Cleaver departed from the middle-class Uncle Tom figures of Black Jeremiad. Cleaver was notorious for flaunting his ex-convict past and cursing during his public speeches as a way to identify with and speak to the black underclass. Although Cleaver is less explicit in his writing, he deploys a similar strategy even as he borrows from the religious and middle-class rhetoric of the Black Jeremiad. In his writing, Cleaver’s language frequently exhibits the contrasting styles. According to Geneva Smitherman in her study of black vernacular entitled *Talkin and Testifyin*, the rhetorical qualities of black expression include the following characterizations: “exaggerated language (unusual words, High Talk); mimicry; proverbial statement and aphoristic phrasing; punning and plays on words; spontaneity and improvisation; image-making and metaphor; braggadocio; indirection

(circumlocution, suggestiveness); and tonal semantics” (94). Of these qualities, Smitherman writes that secular urban style of black expression emerged out of as well as developed separately from the religious southern style and is “manifested in forms like the Dozens, the Toast, the blues, and folk talks, all of which were transformed to accommodate the urban experience” (88). She argues that black street vernacular is perhaps better conceived as verbal performance not unlike rap. She writes,

Rappers sprinkle their talk with uncommon words and rarely used expressions” as well as “achieve [verbal power] through the use of words and phrases carefully chosen for sound effects In employing tonal semantics, the rapper gets meaning and rhetorical mileage by triggering a familiar sound chord in the listener’s ear. The word may or may not make sense; what is crucial is the rapper’s ability to make the words sound good. They will use rhyme, voice rhythm, repetition of key sounds and letters. (100)

Throughout, Cleaver’s use “uncommon words and rarely used expressions” can be seen in phrases like “Supermasculine Menial,” “Higher Uneducation,” “Mickey Mouse music,” “Louisville Lip,” and “Ofay Watchers Anonymous” (192; 37; 105; 121; 87). Also, Cleaver’s use of tonal semantics is visible in many of his sentences. For example, notice the rhythm in the following sentence: “I’m perfectly aware that I’m tall, that I’m skinny, that I need a shave, that I’m hard-up enough to suck my grandmother’s old withered tits” (38). In “To All Black Women, from All Black Men,” he writes in rhyme, “And although I greet you anew, my greeting is not new, but as old as the Sun, Moon, and Stars” (236). In the following example, we can also see “repetition of key sounds and letters”: “Frigid, cold, icy, ice. Arctic. Antarctic. At the end of her flight from her body is a sky-wall of ice” (214). In addition to the unusual words and tonal semantics, the book is sprinkled throughout with plays on words including the “use of images, metaphors, and other kinds of imaginative language” (Smitherman 96).

In the writing, Cleaver often embodied the black street culture through the use of braggadocio or dozens. Braggadocio or dozens is exaggerated language that often takes the form of boasting of one's badness. Smitherman defines it thus: "Whether referring to physical badness, fighting ability, lovemanship, coolness, the aim is to convey the image of an omnipotent fearless being" (97). In the passage below, Cleaver criticizes the corruption of American politics at the same time, expresses his badness:

And all of this in a nation where the so-called molders of public opinion, the writers, politicians, teachers, and cab drivers, are willful, euphoric liars, or zip-dam ostriches and owls, a clique of undercover ghosts, a bunch of Walter Jenkinses, a lot of coffee-drinking, cigarette-smoking, sly, suck-assing, status-seeking, cheating, nervous, dry-balled, tranquilizer-gulched, countdown-minded, out-of-style, slithering snakes. (*Soul* 224)

Often dismissed as the lowest of street talk, "the objective of the Dozens is to better your opponent with more caustic, humorous 'insults.' Played for fun or viciousness—and it can be either—the dozens is a competitive oral test of linguistic ingenuity and verbal fluency" (Smitherman 131). Another example is from "An Aside to Ronald Reagan," one of Cleaver's more famous speeches. Because the speech is a good demonstration of his transgressive use of black street vernacular, especially the dozens, I briefly mention it here. In the speech, Cleaver publically denounced Ronald Reagan, who was then a California governor, among others for attempting to prevent Cleaver's speaking engagement at the University of California at Berkeley:

You, Donald Duck Rafferty, Big Mama Unruh, and that admitted member of the racist John Birch Society who introduced the resolution into the legislature to censure those responsible for inviting me to lecture in the first place—All and each of you can kiss my black nigger ass, because I recognize you for what you are, racist demagogues who have their eye on the ballot come November I think you are a cowardly, cravenhearted wretch. You are not a man. You are a punk All I ask is a sporting chance. Therefore, Mickey Mouse, I challenge you to a duel, to the death, and you can choose the weapons. And if you can't relate to that, right on. Walk, chicken, with your ass picked clean. (*Post-Prison* 111-2).

In a similar humorous dozens, Cleaver exclaims in the book, “All society shows the convict its ass and expects him to kiss it: the convict feels like kicking it or putting a bullet in it” (39).

Cleaver knew that to use the street expression was a way in which he can not only represent the experiences of the urban black youths but also to speak to them.

To Cleaver, the fight for racial freedom needed to include the urban black youth, the most vulnerable to the practice of racial terror and the self-destructive expressions of criminality. He felt that the middle-class black jeremiahs didn’t speak for this population of the underclass. Cleaver’s refused to be constrained by bourgeois respectability but also feel ashamed of his convict identity. For instance, it was his trademark to publically announce his working-class street background: “Eldridge Cleaver—the apotheosis of the American nightmare: loudmouthed nigger, ex-convict, rapist, advocate of violence” (*Post-Prison* 110). In the book, he also writes, “I’m perfectly aware that I’m in prison, that I’m a Negro, that I’ve been a rapist, and that I have a Higher Uneducation. I never know what significance I’m supposed to attach to these factors” (37). By refusing to toe the class line, he exhorted other black underclass to join the racial revolution.

Cleaver argued for the freedom of the “lumpen,” a term he uses to describe himself and those incarcerated in prison. The “lumpen-proletariat” is a Marxist term that refers to the class of outcasts within the working class. To Marx, although at the lowest class level, they were an underclass so corrupt and base that they were incapable of political revolution and thus lost to the class struggle. In *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, Marx identifies the lumpen as “vegabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, escaped galley slaves, swindlers, mountebanks, lazzaroni, pickpockets, tricksters, gamblers, maquereaux [pimps], brothel keepers, porters, literati, organ grinders, ragpickers, knife grinders, tinkers, beggars” (229). Marx

conjectured that this class was unlikely to achieve any sort of class consciousness beyond their personal gratification. In contrast, Cleaver believed that the lumpen were capable of political action. Cleaver radically differed in his opinion especially of the black convicts who were criticized by black activists. In contrast, Cleaver believed that the lumpen represented an important group that would bring about a revolution and thus needed to be reorganized into political action. In “Initial Reactions on the Assassination of Malcolm X,” Cleaver depicts his fellow inmates as political groups who lamented the death of their political “Leader,” Malcolm X (83). In arguing for the legacy for Malcolm X in revolutionizing those in prison, Cleaver also suggests that the black convict class’s potential is misunderstood:

One that that the judges, policemen, and administrators of prisons seem never to have understood ... is that Negro convicts, basically, rather than see themselves as criminals and perpetrators of misdeeds, look upon themselves as prisoners of war, the victims of a vicious, dog-eat-dog social system. (81)

Cleaver reasons that the lumpen is important because they represent those who have resisted conforming to become a socially acceptable Uncle Tom:

One tactic by which the rules of America have kept the bemused millions of Negroes in optimum subjugation has been a conscious, systematic emasculation of Negro leadership. Through an elaborate system of sanctions, rewards, penalties, and persecutions—with, more often than not, members of the black bourgeoisie acting as hatchet men—any negro who sought leadership over the black masses and refused to become the tool of white power structure was either cast into prison, killed, hounded out of the country, or blasted into obscurity and isolation in his own land and among his own people. (111)

Cleaver asserts that only the African-American male leaders who fall in line with the stereotype of Uncle Tom are those who are rewarded with social recognition and the lumpen, those who are “either cast into prison ... or hounded out of the country” are incarcerated for refusing to “become the tool of white power structure.”

Cleaver's belief in the lumpen was most clearly visible in his decision to join the Black Panther Party. According to Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar, the Black Panther party was established as a working-class party in opposition to the middle-class cultural nationalist parties popular during the period. The party sought to recruit and organize black youths from the "ghettos" who in his view were a largely ignored population. In order to organize them in the revolutionary class struggle, Newton devised programs such as Free Breakfast for Children and Community Health Clinics in order to reach the underclass he described as "unemployables." Leading the party, both Cleaver and Newton exploited the tough thug image in order to uphold the "ghetto" values of the party. Cleaver appreciated Newton's principles in making the party a "practicing" lumpen party. Similarly, Newton and Bobby Seale were impressed with Cleaver's lumpen past. It's interesting to note that Cleaver's belief in the lumpen also included white youths. In "White Race and Its Heroes," he predicts that the white hippy beatniks who were looked upon as "mere obscene misfits who were too lazy to take baths and too stingy to buy a haircut" would lead the next stage in the class revolution (95). In this essay, he argues that the members of the beatnik generation are the outlaws of his day and have "lost all respect for their elders, for law and order" and thus predicts that they would be an important part of the black revolution to come (105).

In conclusion, Cleaver deploys the differing and contrasting protests of the period—the militant and defiant black nationalist and the conservative and religious black jeremiad tradition—in an attempt to speak and unite the divergent (and sometimes opposing) audiences. Ultimately, however, Cleaver's work is a largely unreconciled struggle. Cleaver's rhetorics outlaw ethos, violence, and redemption falls short of his own message for unity across racial, class, and gender lines.

CHAPTER THREE: “THE ILLUSION OF OTHERNESS”: THE RHETORIC OF NEWS-WRITING IN MUMIA ABU-JAMAL’S *LIVE FROM DEATH ROW*

Mumia Abu-Jamal is an African-American political activist and journalist who is currently “the most recognized... death row inmate in the world” (Williams D. xiii). In 1981, Mumia Abu-Jamal was found guilty of killing a Philadelphia police officer, Daniel Faulkner, and was sentenced to death in a highly controversial case that many argued was replete with racial prejudice and corruption. Since 1981, while awaiting his death, he has written to protest his innocence and the corruption of the U.S. criminal justice system, especially the inhumanity of the death penalty. Currently, he is one of the most prolific prison writers as well as a leader of the Free Mumia movement, and he has been instrumental in raising public awareness about the injustices of racial violence and corruption in the U.S. criminal justice system. In this chapter, I provide an analysis of *Live from Death Row*, an influential book that has successfully raised public awareness about an issue that has historically been relegated to the margins of social concern, shrouded in social and cultural misrepresentation, and at times explicitly censored. Abu-Jamal successfully utilizes his prison writing as a hybrid form of personal and civic writing, and he does this by reframing it as communal news.

Before the analysis of the text, I discuss Abu-Jamal’s biographical information and the social movement generated by his death row case. Then, in the next section, I argue that Abu-Jamal’s writing must be considered within the specific constraints that prison writers faced in their efforts to speak out about the injustices of the criminal justice and correctional system. In

addition to the cultural misrepresentations of prison and prisoners in the popular media, the book reveals the legal censorship of prison writers. Lastly, I analyze how Abu-Jamal's use of news-writing overcomes the specific constraints of prison writing by making the unjust and corrupt practice of prison not only visible but also concrete and urgent to readers. By blending in elements of news-writing, such as investigative reporting and human-interest stories, he creates the effect of objective, real-time news.

THE FREE MUMIA MOVEMENT: MUMIA ABU-JAMAL AND HIS CASE

On December 9, 1981, Abu-Jamal was found lying critically wounded on the streets of Philadelphia next to a body of a young police officer, Daniel Faulkner, who was fatally shot and found dead upon the arrival of the police. According to Abu-Jamal's account, he was driving in the street when he witnessed his brother being beaten by police. He stopped to intervene in the situation when an unknown assailant who fled the scene, shot them both. The unknown assailant was never found and Abu-Jamal was convicted of the murder of Daniel Faulkner and sentenced to death in a controversial court case. At the time, Abu-Jamal had no prior convictions and was a respected community leader in Philadelphia.

Since 1982, Abu-Jamal's case has received tremendous attention, with many scholars and critics unequivocally declaring that the ruling is deeply problematic and racist. J. Patrick O'Connor, in his investigation of Abu-Jamal's case, argues that "Abu-Jamal's trial was, in so many different ways, a travesty of justice" (6). He claims that the "trial was riddled with so many types of judicial and prosecutorial abuses that it was a sham from beginning to end" (4). Similarly, Amnesty International has found that the Pennsylvania court was far from "fair" and "impartial":

The trial of Mumia Abu-Jamal took place in an atmosphere of animosity and tension.... The law enforcement community's unseemly agitation for the

execution of Mumia Abu-Jamal is just one of the Amnesty International's concerns over this case.... Amnesty International remains concerned that the relationship between the Pennsylvania judiciary and the law enforcement community at the very least gives rise to the unfortunate impression that justice is a one-way street leading to Mumia Abu-Jamal's eventual execution. (34)

Amnesty International reports that not only did Abu-Jamal clearly lack an adequate defense by counsel but also the court proceedings themselves were replete with prosecutor misconduct, mishandling of evidence, and police corruption. More important, Amnesty International raises questions as to the fairness of capital punishment trials. The "conviction and death sentence against Mumia Abu-Jamal illustrate many of Amnesty International's long-term concerns regarding the administration of capital punishment in the United States of America" (summary).

Since the night of the shooting, Abu-Jamal himself has long denied the charge and claimed that he was essentially framed for his radical political beliefs. He points out that he was unfairly depicted in court as a dangerous enemy of the state using his association with MOVE, the black liberation group that had an ongoing conflict with the Philadelphia police department at the time, and his past membership in the Black Panther Party. He also argues that he was not given a fair trial in which he could defend himself, that he was denied adequate representation as well as a jury of peers. In *Executing Justice: An Inside Account of the Case of Mumia Abu-Jamal*, Daniel R. Williams, Abu-Jamal's lawyer, further provides his own testimony of the court proceedings. In addition to affirming Abu-Jamal's claims about the unfairness of the court proceedings, he claims that the political climate in Philadelphia was racially tense at the time of the shooting incident. Largely because of the 1978 shootout incident with MOVE that also resulted in a death of a police officer, Williams argues that Abu-Jamal, a black man who had also written favorably of MOVE in his news articles, served as a ready target. He writes, "in racially

polarized Philadelphia in 1981, a black man with dreadlocks [Abu-Jamal] was immediately looked upon as an enemy of the police” (8)

Since being imprisoned, Abu-Jamal has written publically and extensively about the unfairness of his case as well as his experience of racial discrimination on death row. His writings include memoirs, essays, and interviews such as *Live from Death Row* (1995), *All Things Censored* (2000), *Faith of Our Fathers* (2002), *We Want Freedom: A Life in the Black Panther Party* (2004), *Marxism, Reparations & the Black Freedom Struggle* (2007), *Jailhouse Lawyers: Prisoners Defending Prisoners v. the U.S.A.* (2009), and *The Classroom and the Cell: Conversations on Black Life* (2012). He has also contributed articles to *Nation*, *Essence*, *Black Scholar*, and *Yale Law Journal*. In addition to penning personal reflections on prison and death row, he has collaborated with many writers and scholars on projects that deal with the topics of race, law, and criminal justice in the United States. After having exhausted all of his appeal options, his death sentence was commuted by the state, and he was moved to serve a life-sentence at Mahanoy State Correctional Institution in Pennsylvania in 2001. Many critics attribute the commuted sentence to Abu-Jamal’s publication success and the international Free Mumia movement, one of the largest and longest running campaign for an imprisoned individual, which was in part generated by his writings from prison.

The movement began on college campuses “where students collected donations for his legal defense fund.... [and] found a place in popular culture that has extended into the Internet age on blogs and Facebook pages” (Williams D. para 6). Over the years, the movement made Mumia Abu-Jamal a household name with the aid of famous celebrities, writers, and artists who used their star power to raise public awareness about the case. In addition to benefit concerts in his name by the Beastie Boys and Rage Against the Machine, over 140 celebrities, writers,

artists, and activists wrote in support of Abu-Jamal demanding a retrial in the 1996 publication entitled *In Defense of Mumia*. They included prominent public figures like Toni Morrison, Allen Ginsberg, E.L. Doctorow, Gwendolyn Brooks, Margaret Randall, Patricia Williams, Cornel West, Amiri Baraka, Manning Marable, Dennis Brutus, Piri Thomas, and Sonia Sanchez. There have also been numerous independent investigations of his case that refuted the court's findings. These include Leonard Weinglass's *Race for Justice: Mumia Abu-Jamal's Fight Against the Death Penalty* (1994); Terry Bisson's *On a Move: The Story of Mumia Abu-Jamal* (2000); Amnesty International's "United States of America: A Life in the Balance—the Case of Mumia Abu-Jamal"; Daniel R. Williams's *Executing Justice: An Inside Account of the Case of Mumia Abu-Jamal* (2001); Dave Lindorff's *Killing Time: An Investigation Into the Death Row Case of Mumia Abu-Jamal* (2003); J. Patrick O'Connor's *The Framing of Mumia Abu-Jamal* (2008). As a result of the movement, Abu-Jamal is an honorary citizen of more than 20 cities around the world and is considered "the world's best known death row inmate" (Rimer para 1). In the Free Mumia movement, Abu-Jamal is upheld as "a symbol of the racial inequalities and other injustices of the American death penalty system" and as someone whose case has brought visibility to the issue of racism and corruption in the U.S. prison and criminal justice system (Rimer para 4).

"FROM THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH": MUMIA ABU-JAMAL'S *LIVE FROM DEATH ROW*

Live from Death Row is Abu-Jamal's first book-length publication, a collection of essays on his imprisonment on Pennsylvania's death row. When it was published, critics praised it as an important deliberation on the national and civic issues of racial injustice (Wideman and

Williams).¹ At the center of the book lies Abu-Jamal's argument about U.S. law, specifically that it is subjective, arbitrary, and racist. He writes,

Several years ago the Pennsylvania Supreme Court affirmed my conviction and sentence of death, by a vote of four justices... As a black journalist... I've often studied America's long history of legal lynchings of Africans.... I still harbored a belief in U.S. law, and the realization that my appeal had been denied was a shocker. I could understand intellectually that American courts are reservoirs of racist sentiment and have historically been hostile to black defendants, but a lifetime of propaganda about American "justice" is hard to shrug off. (xvi-xvii)

Abu-Jamal opens with an argument about the U.S. courts and law. He writes that the law is upheld to be infallible, that it is often construed by the public as an institution that is just, neutral, and objective. However, he argues that after he was convicted, he was able to see the true nature of the U.S. courts and law, which is imprecise, contradictory, and biased.

Although the collection is based on Abu-Jamal's experience of imprisonment, his story is only a part of the narrative in the book; rather, it is composed of series of short essays and news articles. Thus it is unlike a conventional prison writing in many ways. First, Abu-Jamal positions his story as just one of many he witnesses on death row. Second, he provides critical analyses of various court cases and the stories of his fellow inmates, focusing on social concerns related to the criminal justice and penal system. For example, in "On Death Row: Fade to Black," he cites a well-known study by David C. Baldus on the death penalty cases of 1970s and 1980s that reinstituted the death penalty. The Baldus study revealed that African-Americans were more likely than any other race to receive the death penalty. In the 1972 *Furman v. Georgia* case, the Baldus study played a central role in the ruling against capital punishment. Finding capital

¹In reviews, *Live from Death Row* is interchangeably referred to as prison writing or prison memoir. For example, in a review by Boyd Herb, it is described as a part memoir and part reportage. In the introduction to the book, John Edgar Wideman argues that it is a neoslave narrative, a sort of autobiographical writing in the tradition of slave narratives.

punishment a constitutional violation, the court instituted a de facto moratorium on capital punishment, arguing that the apparent arbitrariness with which the death penalty is imposed in regards to the African-American defendants was a violation of the prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment. However, in 1987, the ruling was reversed in *McCleskey v. Kemp*. Reinstating capital punishment nationwide, the court argued that, although the Baldus study may be valid, it is still “no reason to declare the entire system unconstitutional” (*McCleskey v. Kemp* 481). Severely criticizing the ruling, Abu-Jamal argues that the ruling is a confirmation of the second-class citizen status of African-Americans. Despite the fact that race is an undeniable factor in the imposition of the death penalty, that the U.S. court reinstated the capital punishment is a demonstration of how racist and thus unjust U.S. law actually is.

Referring to his own case as well as other rulings, Abu-Jamal provocatively describes death row as “legal lynching” (xvi). He writes, “McCleskey... leaves intact the power of the state to further cheapen black life” (33). In “Blackmun Bows Out of the Death Game,” he criticizes Harry A. Blackmun, a justice who had previously voted for the death penalty in the 1976 *Gregg v. Georgia* case. Then, in the 1994 Supreme Court case of *Callins v. Collins*, he dissented, declaring “I no longer shall tinker with the machinery of death (Abu-Jamal 94). Abu-Jamal writes, “[Blackmun’s] singular dissent, comes almost a quarter century too late for many in the shadow of the death house” (94). In this way, Abu-Jamal relays the imprecise, subjective, and arbitrary nature of the U.S. courts and law throughout the writing.

In addition to the death row cases, Abu-Jamal explicitly argues against the contradictions he encountered in the corrections system, specifically the rhetoric of retributivism that is popularly referred to as “just deserts.” Just deserts is a philosophy of corrections that emerged roughly during the 1970s and 1980s as a response to the failure of the rehabilitative medical

model in the first half of the twentieth century. According to Robert G. Singer, during the early twentieth century, the rehabilitative medical model was based on the belief that criminal behavior was a form of sickness to be cured. During this time, many medical and rehabilitative programs were mandatory and played an integral part of parole board decisions. The convicted would be sentenced to a range of years, and the board would often determine the release of the convict depending on their evaluation of his/her behavior. During this period, it was not unusual to have a sentence that was 1 to 10 years. However, by the 1970s, many criminologists began to question their beliefs about the underlying philosophy of rehabilitative programs. In their studies, not only did they find the medical model ineffective in changing long-term behavior but also determined that it was ultimately inhumane and unjust. Rather than rehabilitating and reducing the prison population, the medical model was resulting in prisoners feeling unfairly punished by long, indeterminate sentencing. By the mid-1970s, in place of indeterminate sentencing, flat, presumptive, or determinate sentencing practices were adopted by states across the country including Illinois, California, Connecticut, Colorado, Alaska, Arizona, Maine, Indiana, and Minnesota (Singer; Braithwaite and Pettit). In determinate sentencing, the convicted is sentenced to a fixed number of years and the inmates are encouraged but not required to participate in rehabilitative programs.

Ironically, although determinate sentencing began as a reform for prisoners, it was adopted as punitive measures in the correctional system (Sloop; Singer; Cullen; Braithwaite and Pettit). For example, John Sloop has noted the change in the public discourse that began emphasizing the need for punishment, not rehabilitation, as the goal of incarceration and argues that just deserts “[set] the conditions under which this era of discipline [developed]” (139). In *Not Just Deserts: A Republican Theory of Criminal Justice*, John Braithwaite and Philip Pettit

define just deserts as a “punishment of offenders in proportion to their desert; mostly this meant in proportion to the harmfulness and blameworthiness of their actions. Criminals should get what they deserve—no more, no less” (4). Beginning in 1975, the surge in the retributive model of punishment brought on corresponding changes in the criminal justice system including “get tough on crime” bills, longer and harsher sentencing legislation, and “supermax” prison facilities. Sloop writes that “[even] when traditional rehabilitation programs are described during this period, they are given a ‘punishment’ orientation (140). In the book, Abu-Jamal criticizes the retributivism orientation of the contemporary corrections system that emerged from these changes.

Although Abu-Jamal doesn’t use the words “just deserts” specifically, his arguments about corrections refers to the retributive turn in the 1980s: “The U.S. Supreme Court has welded prison doors shut. It has cut off the rights of free press, religion, or civil rights.... Indeed, in the late 1980s the term ‘prisoners’ rights’ became an oxymoron” (*Live* 66). Referring to this period as a “dark, repressive trend in the business field known as ‘corrections,’” he draws from this historical period to argue that the corrections system is largely contradictory: “This is the furrowed face of ‘corrections’ in this age, where none are corrected, where none emerge better than when they came in. This is the face of ‘corrections,’ which outlaws education among those who have an estimated 60 percent illiteracy rate” (54). In addition to the lack of educational programs, he mentions other punitive practices such as the loss of prisoner rights and harsher sentencing practices. For example, in “Actin’ Like Life’s a Ball Game,” he argues against the sentencing of minors as adults and tells a story about Rabbani, who was fifteen-years-old at the time of his arrest and was “one of the first wave of people imprisoned back in the 1970s under new, tougher youth certification statutes that allowed teenagers to be sentenced as adults” (41).

Throughout, Abu-Jamal points out the injustice inherent in the just deserts rhetoric in the correctional system and draws from various historical as well as his fellow inmates' cases in order to argue against the arbitrary, contradictory, and ultimately unjust practices of the criminal justice and correctional system.

In my analysis, Abu-Jamal is able to relay the exigency of his case as well as the larger problems through news-writing, one that confronts and overcomes the obscured nature of prison space. In the next section, I identify some of the challenges that prison writers historically faced in speaking about prison from behind bars, especially the ways in which the space of prison is misrepresented and obscured in society. More specifically, I elaborate on the reception of Abu-Jamal's writing and the misrepresentations of his work in the public censorship of his work.

THE IDEOLOGICAL "BLACK HOLE" FUNCTION OF PRISON: RHETORICAL CONSTRAINTS OF PRISON WRITERS

Abu-Jamal's prison writing is effective in relaying the exigency of the problems of injustice because it first addresses the constraints faced by those who speak from and about prison. Universally, one constraint that prison writers face comes in the form of censorship. For example, in the case of the 1977 Son of Sam law, prison writings were considered "harmful" public speech and legally censored for victim protection. In the legislation, all expressive writings by convicts, including "a movie, book, magazine article, tape recording, phonograph record, radio or television presentation, live entertainment of any kind," were singled out as a class of speech and monitored by the Crime Victims Board (*Simon and Shuster v. New York Crime Victims Board* 109). The statute required all profits made by the expressive work of "an accused or convicted person" to be given to the Crime Victims Board to be reimbursed to the victims (*Simon and Shuster* 109). It was designed to remove the financial incentive for the criminals and at the same time compensate the victims.

However, in 1991, the statute was struck down as a case of unconstitutional censorship and a violation of the First Amendment.² In the Supreme Court case of *Simon and Shuster v. New York Crime Victims Board*, the court ruled that the statute was not only fueled by the desire for retributive justice, but also too overinclusive to be constitutional. According to the opinion by Justice O'Connor, the statute would in effect apply to all literature produced in prison including historically influential works of literature:

[There are a] listing of hundreds of works by American prisoners and ex-prisoners, many of which contain descriptions of the crimes for which the authors were incarcerated, including works by such authors as Emma Goldman and Martin Luther King, Jr. A list of prominent figures whose autobiographies would be subject to the statute.... The argument that a statute like the Son of Sam law would prevent publication of all of these works is hyperbole.... (122)

Ultimately, the overinclusive wording made the law too ambiguous and thus essentially discriminatory and an unconstitutional restriction of free speech.

What is important about this court case is that Abu-Jamal's *Live from Death Row* was published only three years after the ruling. When it was published in 1994, despite the federal court's ruling against the censorship of prison writings, the publication of *Live from Death Row* was characterized as a speech by a "cop killer." For example, in 1994, Abu-Jamal was scheduled to appear on National Public Radio on the program *All Things Considered*. He was to read essays that in the following year would become *Live from Death Row*. However, before the scheduled broadcast, public protests ensued resulting in its cancellation. The opponents of the book used various accusations about Abu-Jamal's character to stop the dissemination of his work. In their arguments, they also associated a specific social value to prison writing, arguing that it should be

²I use the term "prison writings" here, but in the court, the term that was used was "expressive works of any person accused of or convicted of a crime." In the statute as well as in the Supreme Court case that ruled on the constitutionality of the Son of Sam law, the texts in question were prison memoirs.

categorized as “harmful” speech because it negatively impacts the lives of the victims. Led by the widow of the killed officer, Maureen Faulkner, and the Fraternal Order of Police, hundreds of letters were sent to NPR arguing that allowing Abu-Jamal to speak on public radio would unfairly hurt the families of the victim. Arnold Gordon, the first assistant district attorney of Philadelphia, wrote:

You have awarded this murderer of a twenty-five-year-old police officer who left a grieving widow, and a mother, by giving him a platform from which to address perhaps millions of listeners. Who is your next star—Sirhan Sirhan? John Hinckley? Jeffrey Dahmer? Have you no sense of decency, no sense of what is right and what is wrong? Your decision to provide this opportunity to Mr. Abu-Jamal constitutes an insult to police officers and families of murder victims nationwide as well as to the millions of law-abiding citizens who will no doubt be repulsed by your actions. (Faulkner, 81)

After the cancellation, NPR stated to the *New York Times* that there were “serious misgivings about the appropriateness of using as a commentator a convicted murderer seeking a new trial” (Kolbert para. 3). In response to inquiries, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections replied that Abu-Jamal was punished for violating the prison’s policy against inmates getting involved in regular commentaries and/or in business activities (Kolbert para 15).

In the following year, *Live from Death Row* was published. In reviews of the book, it was praised by a community of African-American scholars who saw it as a timely and important work, a significant step forward in the discussion on death row and a unique contribution to the current discussions about prison by someone from the inside; however, despite the positive reviews, demonstrators gathered outside the Addison-Wesley building, the publishing company of *Live from Death Row*. Similar to the previous year, the supporters of Maureen Faulkner, the victim’s wife, and her public supporters actively boycotted the publishing company, claiming that publishing a book by a “cop killer” is socially irresponsible. In the boycott, the victim’s rights proponents used similar arguments to those used in supporting the Son of Sam law,

claiming that society has an ethical and social imperative to protect the public from the writings of those convicted of crime and that criminals should not socially or financially benefit from the stories of their crime. Faulkner publically decried the impact of Abu-Jamal's "fame" in a memoir provocatively entitled *Murdered by Mumia: A Life Sentence of Loss, Pain, and Injustice*. In it, she argues that his writing was not only a constant reminder of her loss, but the fact that the convicted murderer of her husband would "personally profit from the sale of his book shocked [her] the most" (98). In the end, however, Addison-Wesley went through with the publication and publically announced that it would be a violation of freedom of speech to censor his work and added that they considered his work socially beneficial. David Goehring, the publisher noted, "Here is a writer, writing from a place we have never heard from before. Abu-Jamal tells us what it's like to live on death row. His book can only add to the national debate on capital punishment and the prison system" (Faulkner 100).

In the controversy surrounding the publication, we see that Abu-Jamal faced various social and rhetorical constraints in writing from behind bars. His writing was not only implicated in questions of ethics and justice in regards to victim protection but also construed as produced by an immoral character whose voice shouldn't be heard. Because he was perceived as a criminal, immoral, and violent, what he had to say was also construed as harmful and devoid of social value. These social constraints that come from the stereotyping of convicts is best explained by Patricia Williams, whose review of *Live from Death Row* argues for Abu-Jamal's right to speak. Williams argues that *Live from Death Row* is socially valuable even if Abu-Jamal turned out to be truly guilty of his crime:

Abu-Jamal's is hardly an idle "book by a monster" preaching death, teaching death or celebrating violence—it is a book of mourning for the condemned. Mourning the condemned... is something we don't practice a lot in this era. But I think it is central to the project of asking what it is that accounts for the enormous

toll of violence at this moment in history.... It involves seeing even killers as ruined human beings whose potential has been lost to us, and whose loss means something to the community, to the increasingly small world we share. (Williams P 59, 60)

In the review, she specifically argues that Abu-Jamal's book is necessary for the betterment of the community. She writes that it is a "book of mourning for the condemned" and, as such, provides us an alternative view of prison and its inmates, one that is a part of the community albeit one that has become lost. Thus, she points out that if the censorship has to do with the content, it should not apply to Abu-Jamal's prison writing. At the same time, in her fervent appeal for a change in the public view of prisoners, she argues that perhaps the censorship had more to do with the negative perceptions about prisoners that construe them as "monsters" rather than as the "condemned."

In the prison writing, Abu-Jamal addresses the various rhetorical and social constraints that he faced. For instance, he writes that the prison actively attempted to silence him, putting him in isolation in order to prevent him from getting in contact with the outside:

In the aftermath of the hardcover's initial release the state's response was swift repression.... The government's predictable answer to this allegedly constitutionally protected expression was lockdown for "engaging in the business or profession of journalism." Thirty days in the hole. Isolation. (*Live* xx-xxi)

However, Abu-Jamal argues that such institutional attempts to censor him were only a part of the constraints he experienced as a prison writer. The other constraints came in the form of social invisibility and isolation. For example, he writes, "For those people, almost a million at last count, who wear the label 'prisoner' around their necks, there is no law, there is no justice, there are no rights" (87). In other words, those who are labeled prisoner are effectively cast outside the security and concern that comes from being a part of a community.

These constraints that arise from the invisibility of prison as a part of a community have been dealt in the works by prison scholars. For example, Angela Y. Davis and Peter Castor have observed the invisibility of prison as a deeply problematic social issue. For example, Davis's conceptualization of prison is useful in understanding the constraints that Abu-Jamal faced not only in the restrictions and censorship he experienced as a prison writer but also in effectively relaying the actualities—the injustice and corruption—of contemporary correctional systems. In her influential work, Davis observes the paradoxical manner in which the more images of prison pervade popular culture, the less it becomes real as a social problem. She uses the rise of the prison-industrial-complex to illustrate her point. In *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, she argues that as a response to the overcrowding of prisons, the U.S. prisons went through a period of exponential expansion in the 1980s and the 1990s. The result of the prison-industrial-complex in California, for example, was the prisonization of the landscape of that state, which, in her opinion, should have raised significant public concern. However, she argues that the prison-industrial-complex continued unimpeded:

In order to understand the proliferation of prisons and the rise of the prison industrial complex, it might be helpful to think further about the reasons we so easily take prisons for granted. In California, as we have seen, almost two-thirds of existing prisons were opened during the eighties and nineties. Why was there no great outcry? Why was there such an obvious level of comfort with the prospect of many new prisons? A partial answer to this question has to do with the way we consume media images of the prison, even as the realities of imprisonment are hidden from almost all who have not had the misfortune of doing time. (17)

In her argument, the lack of public concern has to do with the public comfort with the existence of prison. In other words, in order to explain the public invisibility of prisons, one must take into account the ubiquitous presence of prisons in popular culture.

Noting the public comfort with prisons, other cultural scholars have also suggested that the lack of public concern is not due to public omission but to the pervasiveness of prison images in popular media. According to Peter Caster, “[prisons] are a ubiquitous part of how contemporary U.S. culture imagines itself, as suggested by the more than 250 U.S. films featuring men in prison and almost 100 focusing on women in prison” (xi). In his argument, we as a society consume images of prison on an everyday basis; at the same time, we as a society is constituted through our perceptions of prison. The role that prison plays in our perception of society can easily be detected in children playing cops and robbers. Similarly, referring to Hollywood films and TV shows such as *Papillon*, *Cool Hand Luke*, *Escape from Alcatraz*, and *Oz*, Davis points out the illusion of familiarity created by the images of prison in popular culture. As Davis eloquently puts it, people find it hard to imagine a society without prisons and perceive it as a permanent fixture of our social landscape.

Peter Caster observes the paradoxical manner in which people take prisons as granted and remain ignorant of the problems of prison. Caster writes, “[Aside] from the incarcerated population and those who work and visit there, actual prisons are closed off from visibility (xi). In explaining the paradox, Caster and Davis argue that the media portrayal of prisons functions to obscure the actualities of prison. In other words, the exaggerated violence and sex in the media portrayal of prisons contribute to the public misconceptions about prison. For example, in the popular TV show *Orange is the New Black*, unrealistic scenes of sex present a distorted view of prison and downplay the effects of imprisonment. In other popular TV shows such as *Oz* and *Prison Break*, what is real is replaced with various fantasies about prison including acts of violence, sex, and prison break.

Closely related to the fantasies of what goes on inside prison is the fantasy of who goes to prison. Caster argues that pervasive images of urban crime, racial gang violence, and black criminality, function to obscure historical and state-sanctioned racial incarceration practices (3). Scholars have studied the various ways in which African-American males are scripted as being violent and criminal in popular culture (Jackson; Davis; Caster; and Sloop). For example, John Sloop, who examined media representations of prisoners between 1969 and 1975, argues that race plays a central role in the public articulation of the prisoner. He writes that the prisoner is African-Americanized: “we begin to see the growth of the ‘essential’ criminal, a convict whose very nature is one of criminality, a convict tied more and more closely to racist stereotypes in the decades that follow” (15). Similarly, in Davis’s analysis, the collective fantasies about who goes to prison also obscure the larger systematic inequality and racism that arises from capitalism:

We thus think about imprisonment as a fate reserved for others, a fate reserved for the “evildoers,” to use the term recently popularized by George W. Bush. Because of the persistent power of racism, “criminals” and “evildoers” are, in the collective imagination, fantasized as people of color. The prison therefore functions ideologically as an abstract site into which undesirables are deposited, relieving us of the responsibility of thinking about the real issues afflicting those communities from which prisoners are drawn in such disproportionate numbers. This is the ideological work that the prison performs—it relieves us of the responsibility of seriously engaging with the problems of our society, especially those produced by racism and, increasingly, global capitalism.... The prison has become a black hole into which the detritus of contemporary capitalism is deposited. (16)

Here, she describes prison as a black hole, a place that functions to hide the existence of social problems that implicate more than issues of crime and punishment. A clear example of the ideological function of prison can be seen in the illusion that the existence of prisons reduces crime (King R). Davis would argue that such illusion functions to relieve society from dealing with fundamental social issues such as poverty and inequality caused by racism and global capitalism. Thus, to prison writers like Abu-Jamal who seek to speak out about the inequalities

and injustices of racism in the criminal justice and the penal system, the ideological black hole of prison then presents an even more difficult problem. Abu-Jamal seeks to argue that the various social issues of injustice and racism are actually perpetuated by the very institution that socially functions to hide those issues.

In *Live from Death Row*, Abu-Jamal mentions how prison is a social space that the public is both fascinated and repelled by:

Much has been written and much has been said about “life” within prison. Some write of the glaring incidents of violence that occur, certain that such subjects will grab the attention of the reader. Others write and play down the violence, let the reader jettison those dark visions, so distant from his or her experience, as simply beyond belief. (53)

Here, Abu-Jamal identifies the conundrum that he faced in writing about prison. How can he render visible the space of prison when so much distortion and misrepresentation already exist in the public imagination? Most important, how can he make prison “real” when it is simultaneously obscured by a sense of familiarity and disbelief? In the next section, I argue that the elements of news-writing allow Abu-Jamal to overcome the various constraints of prison writing in relaying the exigency of social problems of contemporary criminal justice and penal systems.

“FROM DEATH ROW, THIS IS MUMIA ABU-JAMAL”: THE USE OF INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING AND THE INVENTION OF THE REAL

For Abu-Jamal, there exists a disjunction between the real and the imagined prison. For example, he points out the sensationalized media portrayals of death row inmates as a case in point. In “From Echo in Darkness, a Step into Light,” he criticizes the sensational capital case of Jay Smith, which “sparked national attention, several books, and a television movie” (*Live* 35). At the time, Smith was convicted for a triple murder and depicted as an “archdemon, a twisted

sadist and a triple killer” (35). However, after serving twelve years on death row, his conviction was reversed due to findings of prosecutorial misconduct including hidden evidence, perjury, and secret deals. In the article, Abu-Jamal argues that Jay Smith differed significantly from the media’s bestial portrayal:

Having read a news article depicting him as cold and evil with ‘goatlike’ gray eyes, I half expected when I met him to see him bounding around on two cloven hooves.... On Friday, September 18, 1992, at midday, the word came to Smith that his case was over; the prosecution discharged; the defendant free to go. Encased in Pennsylvania hellholes and on death row since 1979, Jay Smith packed his meager possessions, sent a few bye-byes around, shook off the ashes of twelve years, and walked away, stepping back into life. All the books, the multimillion-dollar movies of the week, and the damning news articles paled besides the reality of one man, walking from the stagnant cesspool of prison into freedom. (35-6)

In the juxtaposition of “the books... the movies... the news articles” and the “reality of one man,” we can see the disjunction in the often dramatized public imagination and the actualities of incarcerated conditions.

In order to overcome the disjunction between the imagined and the actual prison, Abu-Jamal incorporates investigative reporting, a distinctive media specialty that is reformist in aim. These are “stories [that] call attention to the breakdown of social systems and the disorder within public institutions that cause injury and injustice” (Ettema and Glasser 3). David L. Protess argues that it specifically seeks to persuade the public by provoking outrage about various injuries and injustice: “Investigative reporting is ‘the journalism of outrage’.... And intended to provoke outrage in their reports of malfeasance. Their work is validated when citizens respond by demanding change from their leaders” (7). For example, the *Washington Post*’s Watergate probe is considered a classic example of investigative reporting, “an original reporting on an issue of significant public concern that reveals information not previously known and perhaps even hidden” (Aucoin 3). Because the subject of the report deals with hidden facts, the

information-gathering process of investigative reporting is more tedious, arduous, and risky, involving “in-depth” reporting, data mining, and building patterns. MacDougall asserts that investigative journalists, also called muckrakers, are “[more] inquisitive, more skeptical, more resourceful and imaginative in knowing where to look for facts, more ingenious in circumventing obstacles, more indefatigable in the pursuit of facts and able to endure drudgery and discomfort” (227). Often undercover methods, eye-witness accounts, and hidden cameras are involved in order to build credibility for the article’s claims.

In *Live from Death Row*, Abu-Jamal “[calls] attention to the breakdown of social systems and the disorder” in prison and exposes the obscured space of prison to the public (Ettema and Glasser 3). For example, in “Manny’s Attempted Murder,” Abu-Jamal indicts the prison as a place of heavy censorship and unchecked corruption; specifically, Abu-Jamal reports that Manny, who had effectively managed his epilepsy for the last ten years, struggled to keep his seizures under control when he arrived in prison. He argues that the prison medical staff’s “treatment” is responsible for the seizures and that it stopped only when he was able to get outside medical help:

In dizzying internal pain, Manny continues his battle against the prison medical bureaucracy that brought him from championship form to the brink of death.... That the culprits those who prescribed this toxic chemical cocktail, still lay hidden is an indictment against a racist system of corruption, masquerading as corrections. (*Live* 49)

Abu-Jamal argues that inmates are subject to frequent medical negligence in prison. We can clearly see elements of investigative reporting in the emphasis on the hidden nature of the controversy. Abu-Jamal writes, “Manny’s recent history seems plucked from the pages of a Robert Ludlum spy-murder mystery, but it is no tale—it is chillingly, utterly true” (47). The story relays the complete power of the institution over the inmates, the publically hidden nature

of prison medical negligence cases, the lack of recourse for inmates in such situations, and the entrenched power of prison.

In addition to exposing the hidden corruption in prison, he writes to provoke outrage about the medical negligence cases in prison. For example, in “Descent into Hell,” Abu-Jamal reports on the recent U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling that allows “prison officials free rein to drug prisoners” (19). Specifically, he relays the detrimental effect of the ruling on the inmates who are subject to the overuse of psychiatric drugs. He begins the article by giving an account of an anonymous inmate under the influence of debilitating psychiatric drugs:

The man sat with arm shackled to the steel grille. A passing glance told much of the tale, a story of utter, total alienation, written in every line wrinkled in his pale face. His white, unstriped jumpsuit revealed the prison’s assignment of the man to the so-called psychiatric observation unit. His inability, or unwillingness, to have eye contact with the men around him suggested avoidance. His tremors and his repetitive, rapid hand and leg clinches and other movements told a darker story.... (22)

Later, he describes the tragic suicide of the anonymous inmate thus:

Moments later, a naked man walked down the tier, his front darkened like wheat toast, an acrid stench rising like an infernal sacrifice. He walked slowly, deliberately, as if lost in thought, as if involved in a languid, aimless stroll on the beach. Twelve hours later he was pronounced dead, with over 70 percent of his body burned. He was identified as Robert Barnes, fifty-seven years old, of Delaware County, Pennsylvania. (20-1)

This story provokes outrage in a couple of ways. First, the report emphasizes the back-story behind the death of an inmate, revealing the suicide as a case of medical negligence and something that could have been prevented. At the end of the back story, the identity of the inmate who was anonymous is revealed to be Robert Barnes. Although brief, the up-close look into the history of the inmate further adds to the already tragic story. Secondly, the story features what looks like an eyewitness account and depicts the suicide as if occurring in real-time. In

reading the graphic and provocative image of the burning inmate, one can't help but feel outrage at the senseless and violent death of Robert Barnes and the gruesome realities of medical negligence in prison.

The book has only two essays that exclusively focus on Abu-Jamal's story, which adds an intimate and personal touch to his investigative report of death row. "The Visit" is a story about a visit by one of his children, Tiny, who "burst into tears" at seeing the Plexiglas that separated her and her father. "Philly daze: an impressionistic memoir" is a short account of his life that begins from the days of his involvement with the Black Panther Party and ends with the night of the shooting. Juxtaposed next to the journalistic pieces of the rest of the book, these essays illuminate Abu-Jamal's subject position and struggles as an inmate. In writing that is deeply personal, lyrical, and evocative, these narratives make his objective writings about death row more compelling.

Through the blending of the personal and the civic writing, Abu-Jamal is better able to relay the exigency of his own case as well as the larger social injustice and inhumanity of prison. By bringing in the community perspective to his writing, he undermines assumptions that belie prison writing practices, especially the focus on the writers themselves as objects to be scrutinized. In other words, it allows Abu-Jamal to relay the experiences of his and other convicts something other than stories of guilt and innocence. In "Teetering on the Brink between Life and Death" he begins by drawing from both the personal and civic modes of writing which are expressed through two distinctly different styles of language. He first opens with a scene describing his daily two-hour yard time, which on this day is cut to only ten minutes due to a storm:

Once the inmates are encaged, the midsummer sky rumbles, its dark clouds swell, pregnant with power and water. A bespectacled white-shirt turns his pale face

skyward, examining nature's quickening portent. The rumbles grow louder as drops of rain sail earthward, splattering steel, brick, and human. "Yard in!" the white-shirt yells, sparking murmurs of resentment among the men.... Although usually two hours long, today's yard barely lasts ten minutes... (4)

Here, Abu-Jamal deploys creative writing techniques, such as the use of sensory descriptions as well as metaphors. The passage feels intimate and personal. For example, the scene is constituted with the descriptions of what he sees, hears, and feels: "The midsummer sky rumbles.... A bespectacled white-shirt turns his pale face skyward.... The rumbles grow louder... drops of rain... splattering steel, brick, and human...." There is also the use of metaphors: "the dark clouds swell, pregnant with water and power." Through his expressive language, we can feel the somber atmosphere of prison as well as the melancholy of the narrator at the sign of the gathering clouds. However, on the same page, there is a noticeable shift in the language:

For approximately twenty-four hundred people locked in state and federal prisons, life is unlike that in any other institution. These are America's condemned, who bear a stigma far worse than "prisoner".... You will find a blacker world on death row than anywhere else. African-Americans, a mere 11 percent of the national population, compose about 40 percent of the death row population. There, too, you will find this writer. It is from Pennsylvania's largest death row at the State Correctional Institute at Huntingdon, in rural south-central Pennsylvania, that I write. In the Commonwealth I am but one of the 123 persons who await death. (5-6)

Here, the shift here is from the expressive to fact-driven, subjective to objective, personal to communal. The shift from expressive narrative-writing to fact-based news-writing style allows Abu-Jamal to privilege the communal view over the personal. He ends this passage by emphasizing that he is "but one of 123 persons who wait death" (6). Abu-Jamal's emphasis on the communal over the personal is a significant rewriting of the prison life-writing practice, especially the construction of its social function as primarily a method of self-improvement. In

Live from Death Row, what we see is that he takes the focus away from him and places it on the larger community of prison and prisoners.

Many of the stories Abu-Jamal tells are stories of fellow inmates, some of which are very personal. These are stories about the suffering he directly witnessed or about an inmate he closely knows; however, many of the stories are also about communities inside prison. For example, in “Relatives Decry ‘Camp Hell,’” Abu-Jamal writes of the prison riot in Camp Hell:

The infamous Camp Hill prison, in midstate Pennsylvania, site of a raging two-day fiery riot, is now becoming more notorious, but for its staff, not its inmates. As after the dreaded Attica rebellion, prisoners faced a postriot round of repression that bordered on the barbaric. The *Harrisburg Sunday Patriot News* reports that a campaign of torture, theft, terror, and degradation greeted prisoners in the aftermath of riotous rage. Initially, inmates were handcuffed and shackled to other inmates, and held for three days this way, outside, in the prison yard. (62-3)

In stories such as these, Abu-Jamal writes about incidents that he hasn’t directly witnessed or experienced, yet through interviews and research, he is able to tell stories that writing in the first-person narrative mode would make impossible.

The fact that these stories are told in the form of news, one of the most commonplace and familiar form of writing about community, is significant. In “Expert Witness from Hell,” Abu-Jamal evokes in the readers the familiarity of reading communal news. In it, he tells a story about a controversy in West Virginia about a fraudulent medical examiner whose numerous testimonies in court were found to be “invalid, unreliable, and inadmissible” (101). As a result of this one man’s false testimonies in court, more than forty-five criminal cases were affected. He writes about Glen Dale Woodall who was serving two life terms until he was found innocent:

In 1987, a twenty-eight-year-old West Virginia cemetery worker, Glen Dale Woodall, was convicted of the vicious, brutal kidnapping and rape of two women.... In Woodall’s case, the testimony of medical examiner Fred Zain was the key that locked him away.... There was only one problem: Zain, forensic expert for the West Virginia State Police for over a decade, was wrong. (100)

The feeling of communal news evoked in these stories present Woodall as a part of the same community as the readers. It effectively presents Woodall as a member of the community whose story should not be neglected.

The reporter's perspective in the writing helps to relay the stories as communal news. Traditionally, an important part of journalist training is learning to adopt a nonpartisan, neutral, and detached point-of-view. Robert Miraldi describes this ideal reporter in *Muckraking and Objectivity*: "The objective journalist is simply an observer, who follows events, describes occurrences, provides background, and perhaps lends some perspective. But he or she is not an active partner in shaping events or re-forming society" (6). He asserts that such ideals of objective journalism continue to inform the culture of news reporting despite the fact that many have challenged the notion of objectivity in the media.

In *Live from Death Row*, Abu-Jamal is neither the subject of the story nor an outsider observer. This is most notable in the way that the narrative shifts in its perspective. For example, in "A Return to Death," the narrative perspective reverts back and forth from first-person to third-person narration. In the below excerpted passage, Abu-Jamal expresses sadness in hearing that his appeal was denied when another inmate's case, which was similar to Abu-Jamal's, was appealed:

The men laugh... but it is not a belly laugh. Beasley's mouth is in a wide smile, but his eyes do not laugh.... I look away, afraid of what mine might reflect. Both Beasley and I have shared enough for one lifetime: The same judge. The same prosecutor. The same entreaty to the jury.... Pennsylvania's superior court, citing the Caldwell/Baker error, lifted Beasley's death sentence; then Pennsylvania's Supreme Court, citing Abu-Jamal, gave it back to him, two years later. The two men play a few lackluster games of cage/ handball, but their hearts are not in it. Their minds are miles away, on loved ones choking in silent pain, on legal strategies for tomorrow, on a system based on law that changes like the fickle central Pennsylvania weather. (*Live* 57)

The shifting point-of-view allows Abu-Jamal to talk about his own life as well as create the voice of an objective journalist. In the above passage, he transitions from using the first-person to third-person point of view. He writes, “I look away....” Then a few lines later, he describes himself as one of “the two men.” In other words, he shifts from a narrator to a detached observer.

The shift in the perspective is also notable when he introduces himself to his readers in the preface. He begins as if he will narrate his story: “Don’t tell me about the valley of the shadow of death. I live there” (xv). Then he writes, “I and some seventy-eight other men spend about twenty-two hours a day in six-by ten-foot cells.... Welcome to Pennsylvania’s death row” (xv). We see a notable shift in the point-of-view where he begins to adopt the tone of a journalist. He writes, “From death row, this is Mumia Abu-Jamal” (xviii). By the end of the preface, his point-of-view has shifted from being one of the inmates to an observer. Another example is “Descent into Hell” Abu-Jamal crafts an exposé of an inmate’s suicide as an eyewitness account. In the description of the anonymous inmate, he relies solely on observable facts. Because this passage has already been cited earlier, I will only mention the relevant parts briefly: “The man sat with arm shackled.... A passing glance told much of the tale, a story of utter, total alienation.... His white, unstripped jumpsuit revealed the prison’s assignment.... His tremors told a darker story” (22). Although Abu-Jamal is a fellow inmate, he writes as if he is an outsider looking in.

In these ways, eyewitness accounts and the reporter’s perspective creates a feeling of reading a real-time news. For example, in Manny’s story, Abu-Jamal emphasizes his continual struggle to survive with a potentially fatal medical condition: “In dizzying internal pain, Manny continues his battles” (49). In “‘On tilt’ by state design,” he ends the story of Harry Washington, an inmate who has developed dementia as a result of his time in solitary confinement, with a similar phrase: “Harry continues his howlings and mindless mutterings of rage at no one in

particular” (26). In this way, in addition to calling attention to the various injustices and corruptions of prison, he relays the urgency of these inmates’ struggles. Abu-Jamal uses the familiarity of news-reporting in order to bring a sense of reality as well as urgency to his depiction of prison.

“A VIOLATION OF ORDINARY PRINCIPLES OF HUMANITY”: THE USE OF HUMAN-INTEREST STORIES AND THE INVENTION OF THE EVERYDAY

Another journalist technique Abu-Jamal uses to relay his prison stories as communal news is human-interest stories. Human-interest journalism can be defined in several ways. First, it is often used as a term referring to the appeal of certain news topics. For example, in the process of news-selection, journalists consider the human-interest appeal in covering topics of impersonal nature. According to Helen MacGill Hughes, human-interest journalism historically consisted of “chatty little reports of tragic or comic incidents in the lives of the people” (13). It emerged around the 1830s with the rise of the commercial press. With the introduction of “the cheap press” or the “penny papers,” which were addressed to a wider public including the working-class readers, the news began to publish what were considered inconsequential items such as “personal gossip, anecdotes, animal stories, and news of the police courts, told in the main in the graphic dialogue form” (8). The change was a departure from the earlier form of news that only covered official acts of the government and commercial announcements and records. Thus, at the time, human-interest news was considered a form of gossip and unworthy of serious coverage; however, it was immensely popular, becoming one of the dominant forms of newswriting. Second, human-interest news also refers to specific approaches to writing, largely storytelling techniques (Bird; Darnton; Maines). Hughes suggests that human-interest news involves stories with a literary angle. They are often dramatized and appeal to the audience’s emotions.

Third, and most important, human-interest stories function to enact a sense of community. Through its human angle attributes such as its focus on the trifles of everyday people, the news enacts a sense of communal identification transcending politics. According to Gary Alan Fine and Ryan D. White in “Creating Collective Attention in the Public Domain: Human Interest Narratives and the Rescue of Floyd Collins,” human interest stories are “media stories that focus on the predicaments and circumstances of particular, but previously unknown, individuals” (58). However, they argue that “these stories provide powerful collective representations that attract public attention and through which individuals can come to recognize that their fellow citizens share their attitudes and emotions” (59).

Abu-Jamal is clearly invested in portraying the space of prison as a part of the community. In “Toxic Shock,” Abu-Jamal poignantly argues that the issues of prison are a community problem:

[Bars], steel, and court orders can’t stop the seepage of pollution that afflicts both the caged and the ‘free.’ Despite the legal illusions erected by the system to divide and separate life, we the caged share air, water, and hope with you, the not-yet-caged.... The earth is but one great ball. The borders, the barriers, the cages, the cells, the prisons of our lives, all originate in the false imagination of the minds of men. (*Live* 52)

In part one, “Life on Death Row,” each essay corresponds with a single inmate’s story. They include “Descent into Hell,” “‘On Tilt’ by State Design,” “On Death Row; Fade to Black,” “From an Echo in Darkness, a Step into Light,” “Night Raiders Meet Rage,” “Acting Like Life’s a Ball Game,” “Legal Outlaws: Bobby’s Battle for Justice,” and “Manny’s Attempted Murder.” These are the stories of Robert Barnes, Harry Washington, Jay Smith, Tim Forest, Rabbani, Bear, Manny and Bobby Brightwell.

Through the stories, Abu-Jamal depicts the injustice experienced by the inmates, but does so by focusing on common experiences. For example, in “Actin’ Like Life’s a Ball Game,” he

tells a story about Rabbani, who was fifteen-years-old at the time of his arrest, and writes of the injustice of spending the days of one's youth behind bars: "He grew into manhood in shackles.... For those critical years in the life of a male, from age fifteen to thirty, which mark the transition from boy to man, Rabbani was entombed in a juridical, psychic, temporal box branded with the false promise 'corrections'" (43). The focus on coming of age illustrates the perspective of the young man who had to look forward to a life without a future. Abu-Jamal mourns the life of the "condemned" young man thus: "When I hear the easy, catchy, mindless slogans like 'three strikes, you're out,' I think of men like Rabbani who had one strike (if not one foul) and are, for all intents and purposes, already outside any game worth playing" (43). Here, it is interesting to note how both phrases "three strikes, you're out" and "Actin' Like Life's a Ball Game," the title of the essay, are both baseball slogans, which seemingly gesture to the mundane and the everyday. At the same time, there is a sharp contrast in the way that the phrases are used in the context of Rabbani's story. In comparison to the way that the phrase, "three strikes, you're out," gestures to the easiness with which the law condemned a young man, the title, "Actin' Like Life's a Ball Game," illustrates the loss of life that the young inmate experienced. Abu-Jamal writes of the loss: "He has never held a woman as a mate or lover; he has never held a newborn in his palm, its heart athump with new life; he hasn't seen the sun rise, nor the moon glow, in almost fifteen years—for a robbery, 'armed' with a pellet gun, at fifteen years old" (43). Here, the depth of the condemnation experienced by Rabbani is depicted as tragic and irreversible. At the same time, we see that the tragic loss is located in the mundane, in not having had a lover nor having held a newborn nor seeing the sun rise.

Throughout, Abu-Jamal focuses on the mundane and the everyday in depicting the lives of the incarcerated:

The most profound horror of prisons lives in the day-to-day banal occurrences that turn days into months, and months into years, and years into decades. Prison is a second-by-second assault on the soul, a day-to-day degradation of the self, an oppressive steel and brick umbrella that transforms seconds into hours and hours into days. (53)

In this way, Abu-Jamal relays the actualities—the cruelty—of the incarcerated condition. In other words, it is only when we can see the everyday mundane experiences of the imprisoned that we can see the loss of “psychological life” and the “assault on the soul” that the incarcerated condition inflicts on the imprisoned (7). In “Teetering on the brink between life and death,” he describes the life inside Pennsylvania’s death row as “22 hours locked in cell, followed by 2 hours of recreation out of cell” (6). In addition, he writes that the outdoor recreation takes place “in a cage, ringed with double-edged razor wire—the ‘dog pen’” (6). In this section, he also alludes to the humiliation that the imprisoned experience on an everyday basis. For example, he describes the body-cavity strip search thus:

Once the prisoner is naked, the visiting-room guard spits out a familiar cadence:
Open yer mouth.
Stick out your tongue.
You wear any dentures?
Lemme see both sides of your hands.
Pull your foreskin back.
Lift your sac.
Turn around.
Bend over.
Spread your cheeks.
Bottom of yer feet.
Get dressed. (9)

Here, the “familiar cadence” of the guard’s command is illustrative of the ways in which the cruelties reside in these everyday procedures in prison.

In addition to the loss of psychological life, on a daily basis, the inmates suffer under an arbitrary, inconsistent, and contradictory prison administration. For example, he mentions

procedures such as the mandatory body-cavity searches during “non-contact” visitation as well as inconsistent security rules such as the permitted use of television but not typewriters. In the section entitled “Control,” he tells a story about an inmate whose request for a typewriter was denied:

One inmate, more interested in his life than his entertainment, argued forcefully with prison administrators for permission to buy a nonimpact, nonmetallic, battery-operated typewriter. Predictably, permission was denied for security reasons. “Well what do y’all consider a thirteen-inch piece of glass?” the prisoner asked. “Ain’t that a security risk?” “Where do you think you’ll get that from?” the prison official demanded. “From my TV!” (7)

Here, using the everyday scene, Abu-Jamal argues that the restriction is cruel, but most importantly, it is doubly so because of the ways in which the inmates’ everyday lives are determined by such illogical and arbitrary rules.

Similarly, by focusing on the everyday, Abu-Jamal is able to point out to his audience how the practice of the death penalty is fundamentally inhumane. He points out that inmates wake up every day to face another day closer to their execution. In this sense, they are at the “death’s door” everyday: “To such men and women, the actual execution is a fait accompli, a formality already accomplished in spirit, where the state concludes its premeditated drama by putting the ‘dead’ to death a second time” (10-1). In other words, the punishment of the death penalty is located in the everyday, not the execution. The focus on the mundane as opposed to the abstract make the inhumanity of the death penalty concrete, urgent, and relevant: “Everyday in America the trek continues, a black march to death row” (76). In these ways, Abu-Jamal reveals the incongruities in the public perception and the actual lived experience of those who are on death row.

In conclusion, Abu-Jamal portrays the imprisoned as everyday people, and by doing so he is able to recast them as the condemned who suffer under an arbitrary, corrupt, and invisible

institution. He is able to relay the injustices of prison as relevant, urgent, and concrete social problems to his readers. In the end, he delivers his own personal story of imprisonment as well as the Pennsylvania's death row and its inmates as news-worthy subjects of communal news.

CHAPTER FOUR: “MY JOURNALS, POEMS, AND WRITINGS ARE HOME”: THE RHETORIC OF BELONGING IN JIMMY SANTIAGO BACA’S *A PLACE TO STAND*

The prison memoir entitled *A Place to Stand* by Jimmy Santiago Baca is centered on his five-year incarceration during the 1970s at Florence State Prison in Arizona. In the memoir, Baca explores the inhumanity of incarceration, but most important, the power of writing to resist the dehumanizing power of prison. Baca writes,

Hope didn’t support me all the time.... Very simply, I learned to read and write. Language gave me a way to keep the chaos of prison at bay and prevent it from devouring me; it was a resource that allowed me to confront and understand my past, even to wring from it some compelling truths, and it opened the way toward a future that was based not on fear or bitterness or apathy but on compassionate involvement and a belief that I belonged. (5)

In the memoir, Baca advocates memoir-writing to the incarcerated as a practice of literacy that fosters a sense of involvement and belonging. I argue that Baca draws from the Chicana/o rhetoric of borderlands in his portrayal of prison. Specifically, he uses the topoi of the border to portray the carceral space as a bordered space and as a place of emotional and mental suffering that can be transcended through writing. As such, his endorsement of literacy offers a view of life-writing practices in prison that transcends the psychosocial bordering of individuals in prison. In the chapter, I begin by introducing Baca’s biographical information and giving a brief overview of his scholarly work and secondary criticism. In the section that follows, I situate Baca’s memoir in the larger context of the Chicano movement poetry tradition, a highly political cultural nationalist arts movement of the 1960s and ‘70s that was foundational to contemporary

Chicano rhetorics of borderlands. Next, borrowing from the theories of border rhetorics, I argue that Baca redefines the modern penitentiary—unmistakably bordered with its razor wire fences and guards—as a kind of a psycho-social “borderland.” In other words, the modern penitentiary is redefined as a place where the inmates’ experience of dispossession, alienation, and disorientation parallels the larger marginalization of Chicano citizens in the barrios of the Southwest. Lastly, I examine Baca’s reconceptualization of memoir-writing and literacy as a way to transcend the psychosocial borders of prison by inventing *A Place to Stand* socially and symbolically.

CHICANO EX-CONVICT/WRITER/ACTIVIST JIMMY SANTIAGO BACA

Baca is a Chicano ex-convict/writer/activist known for his personal story of transformation from an illiterate convict-to-artist. In his prison memoir, he tells his story of learning to read and write in prison at the age of twenty-one. Since his release from prison, he has become a prolific writer whose impressive literary achievements include a variety of genres including poetry, novels, short stories, memoir, and screenplays. These include the play, *Los Tres Hijos de Julia* (1991); the screenplay, *Bound by Honor* (1993); the memoir, *A Place to Stand* (2001); the collection of short stories, *The Importance of a Piece of Paper* (2004); the novel, *A Glass of Water* (2009). Out of all his works, Baca is most celebrated for his collections of poetry, which include—but is not limited to the collections—*Immigrants in Our Own Land* (1979), *Swords of Darkness* (1981), *What’s Happening* (1982), *Martin & Meditations on the South Valley* (1987), *Healing Earthquakes: A Love Story in Poems* (2001), *Set This Book on Fire!* (2001), *C-Train (Dream Boy’s Story) and Thirteen Mexicans* (2002), *Spring Poems along the Rio Grande* (2007).

With many of his works dealing with the themes of the Southwest and Chicano experience in the United States, he is accredited with “putting Chicana/o literature on both the national and international maps” (Neate 125). For his contribution, he has received numerous prestigious awards including the National Endowment of Poetry Award, the Vogelstein Foundation Award, the Berkeley Regents Award, the Pushcart Prize, the Southwest Book Award, the American Book Award, the International Award, the National Hispanic Heritage Award, the Cornelius P. Turner Award, the Luis Leal Award for Chicano/Latino Literature, and an Honorary Ph.D. from the University of New Mexico. He has held the Wallace Stevens Endowed Chair for Creative Writing at Yale University and his personal papers are archived at Stanford University in the library’s distinguished author’s collection.

In secondary studies, scholars have analyzed his works including the memoir in various contexts; however, many agree that he is first and foremost a writer who should be considered one of the post-movement poets who exhibit strong political elements in their art (Olguin; Pérez-Torres; Bruno, and Michelson). These are poets whose works maintain the tradition of the cultural nationalism of El Movimiento, a tremendously important historical event that is fundamental to the Chicano rhetorics of borderlands and the formation of Chicano identity. In *Movements in Chicano Poetry: Against Myths, Against Margins*, Pérez-Torres writes that Baca’s literary oeuvre is ultimately about “[scrutinizing] the underside of American power” (115). According to Wilson Neate in *Tolerating Ambiguity: Ethnicity and Community in Chicano/a Writing*, despite Baca’s attempt to craft a more nuanced and individualistic portrayal of Chicano/a experience, his poetry should be considered one of the “Chicano Master Narratives” because he relies on a broad and unified view of Chicano history that is complicit in the patriarchal ideology of the cultural nationalist movement (125). As I will elaborate later, Baca’s

memoir must be read within the context of the Chicano cultural tradition, especially the cultural nationalist protest tradition of El Movimiento. In the memoir, Baca draws from his experience growing up as a Chicano in the borderlands, the barrios of New Mexico during 1950s and '60s, but also uses the Chicano rhetorics of borderlands that emerged from within this period. Thus, in the next section, I provide a brief discussion of the movement before presenting an analysis of the memoir's arguments about prison and literacy as bordering practices.

CHICANO EXPERIENCE IN THE BORDERLANDS

The cultural nationalist movement of the 1960s and '70s was a Mexican American political movement that originated in the borderlands, the geographical territory between Mexico and the United States. The borderlands refer to the Southwest border states, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, and Wyoming that were originally Mexican lands, and then ceded to the United States in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the indigenous, Mexican, and Chicano inhabitants who lived on the land experienced various forms of discrimination, including the dispossession of their lands and property (Acuna; Anaya; Anzaldúa; Barrera; San Miguel Jr.). For example, Michelle A. Holling writes in "A Dispensational Rhetoric in 'The Mexican Question' in the Southwest" that the overt discrimination aimed at Mexican Americans in this region throughout much of the nineteenth and twentieth century can be seen in the public rhetoric of the period, which characterized the presence of Mexican-Americans as "a problem":

Formal inquiries commenced in 1924 at both state and national levels to understand the "Mexican problem" in order to address the question as to what to do with Mexican (Americans). Characterizing the "Mexican problem" were social anxieties about Mexican (Americans) as an "unassimilable" group.... Mexican (Americans) were thought to be "an economic and social threat"; language deficient; lacking in morals, sanitation, and intelligence; and thus unable to fit within the social system. (74)

Holling argues that the construction of Chicanos as “unassimilable” and consequently as a social “problem” justified the legalized discrimination against Chicanos well into the late twentieth century.¹

The history of this region, specifically the historical dispossession and alienation experienced by Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, is important in understanding the development of Chicana/o consciousness and politics. For example, the national Mexican-American civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s was not only a response to the treatment of Chicanos in the region as second-class citizens but also a protest against the cultural hegemony that construed Chicano identity, language, and culture as inferior. One significant aspect of the protests involved the Spanish-speaking students in public schools, who were stereotyped as menial laborers, lazy, dirty, unintelligent, illiterate, illegal, and unassimilable (Barrera; San Miguel Jr.). It was common practice to implement no-Spanish policies in public schools, which created an environment of cultural discrimination that resulted in disadvantaging Spanish-speaking students. To speak Spanish was seen not only as a manifestation of Chicano students’ alien status but also a marker of their intelligence. According to Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr. in *Chicana/o Struggle for Education*, low academic achievement by working-class Spanish-speaking students was largely explained with the “myth of underachievement based on language barriers” (86).²

¹John Sloop and Kent A. Ono’s book *Shifting Borders: Rhetoric, Immigration, and California’s Proposition 187* is an example of such laws. Proposition 187 is an example of an anti-immigrant initiative that occurred in the 1990s. Passed in November 1994, it eliminated public health, welfare, and education provisions to undocumented migrants. Their analysis of the public discourse surrounding proposition 187 revealed a xenophobic and racist underpinning in the campaign’s “demeaning depictions of undocumented workers, primarily from Mexico” (3).

²Since the 1920s, research had erroneously linked bilingualism as an indication of low school achievement. However, the problem was only partly due to the language barriers. Rather, literacy studies that began in the 1960s pointed to the racial discrimination in public schools as the reason

According to Michael Victor Sedano, in protesting the cultural hegemony experienced by the Chicanos in the borderlands, an important objective of El Movimiento was the assertion of political self-definition and self-determination; in “Chicanismo: A Rhetorical Analysis of Themes and Image of Selected Poetry from the Chicano Movement,” he describes the movement as having “one overriding objective: to establish a cultural consciousness ... [of] Chicanismo” (177). An example can be seen in Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales’s historic speech, “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán”:

In the spirit of a new people that is conscious not only of its proud historical heritage but also of the brutal “gringo” invasion of our territories, we, the Chicano, Mexican, Latino, Indigenous inhabitants and civilizers of the northern land of Aztlan from whence came our people of the sun, declare that the call of our sangre is our power, our responsibility, and our inevitable destiny.... With our heart in our hands and our hands in the soil, we declare the independence of our mestizo nation.... Before the world, before all of North America, before all our brothers in the bronze continent, we a nation, we are a union of free pueblos, we are Aztlán. (qtd in Anaya 1)

Gonzales was one of the movement poets who used his creative art to not only mobilize disparate Latino, Mexican, and indigenous groups but also empower them through the celebration of ethnic identity, culture, heritage, and history (Ybarra-Frausto; Pérez-Torrez; and Candelaria).

for the low school achievement of Spanish-speaking students. For example, the National Education Association of the United States published a report entitled “The Invisible Minority” in 1966. In the report, the notion of underachievement based on language barriers was revealed to be a myth. It argued that it wasn’t the student’s bilingualism that resulted in the Mexican-American students from struggling academically. For example, the report argued that the no-Spanish speaking policies were in fact a form of cultural discrimination that negatively stereotyped Spanish-speaking students and most importantly, affected the self-esteem of these student in ways that were detrimental to their academic success: “the harm done the Mexican-American child linguistically is paralleled—perhaps even exceeded—by the harm done to him as a person (11). San Miguel argues the stereotypes of Spanish-speaking students involved their cultural and racial identities.

From within this tradition of cultural nationalist protest of El Movimiento emerged the Chicano rhetorics of borderlands. By Chicano rhetoric of borderlands, I refer to the ways in which borders and spaces are used as a mode of exploring social and civic identities. For example, during the movement, the notion of Aztlán is used to articulate the Chicano subject position and heritage. These movement poets drew from the symbol of Aztlán, a concept that becomes one of the fundamental signifiers of Chicano identity in literature. For instance, in “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán,” Aztlán, which literally refers to the place of origin of the Aztecs, is deployed to signify the Chicano identity. According to Pérez-Torres, Aztlán draws together “geography, culture, history, genetics, migration, tradition, heritage, unity, authenticity” and “crystallizes in one term the history of dispossession endured by Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, and Chicanos alike” (57). As a signifier of Chicano identity, it is dynamic and expansive. It symbolizes the unity as well as proliferation and difference of Chicano identity in various political, social, and cultural contexts. Most important, it is a representation of a place, and as such functions as a “signifier marking the completion or return of the Chicano to a homeland” and as a claim to a political belonging, civil rights, and equality in the nation (Pérez-Torres 59).

In an influential book, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa uses the notion of the border as a way to protest the subjugated position of the Chicana. Specifically, the notion of the border is used as a signifier of the alienation and ambivalence she experienced as a Chicana:

The actual physical borderland that I’m dealing with in this book is the Texas-U.S. Southwest/Mexican border. The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more culture edge each other.... I am a border woman. I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican... and the Anglo.... I have been straddling that Tejas-Mexican border, and others, all my life. It’s not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of

contradictions. Hatred, anger and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape. (Preface)

In Anzaldúa's use of borderlands, the term implicates more than the geographical terrain. It refers to a psychosocial condition of living with contradictions and alienation.

Extending Anzaldúa's use of the borderlands, the term has been theorized as a kind of topoi with which to investigate the concepts of citizenship and national belonging. In what is called "border studies," scholars like Anzaldúa, D. Robert DeChaine, Josue David Cisneros, Kent Ono, John Sloop, and Michelle A. Holling have productively investigated how Chicana/os have been marginalized in their experience of citizenship. Similarly, using the concept of the "border" as a kind of rhetorical topoi, Robert Dechaine argues that the notion of the border can be used to further investigate 1) how to understand the "place and power of borders in people's everyday lives" and 2) how such socially spatialized and constructed borders become a "dynamic site of hegemonic struggle over terms and conditions for the formation of national and ethnic identities" (4-5). Dechaine uses the notion of the border to make the claim about the contemporary anti-immigration discourse. He asserts that contemporary anti-immigration discourse is ultimately a racial construction of Chicano bodies as "bordered subjects":

Anti-immigrant sentiment, rooted in nativism and materialized in processes of racialization, has long influenced US public attitudes toward migrants and other border crossing subjects.... Along with its racist and nativist underpinnings, the alienation of border(ed) subjects is also predicated on a state-directed discourse of migrant illegality, a mode of subjectivity that constructs the "illegal alien" as one who is by nature out of place, a problem, a threat to the national body. (21)

Dechaine argues that "[Border studies] provides a means of investigating how institutional, majoritarian, and vernacular discourses shape and are shaped by border(ing) rhetorics, and how, in turn, border(ed) conditions and spaces spur resistive politics and unique forms of social critique" (5). Similarly, although Baca doesn't explicitly use the term borderlands, the concept of

“bordered subjects” is tremendously important in the narrative of his prison memoir. Being a Chicano and a convict are all seen as manifestations of being a bordered subject.

“STAIN ON THEIR ILLUSION OF A PERFECT AMERICA”: THE CHICANO AS A BORDERED SUBJECT

A Place to Stand is a prison memoir that narrates Baca’s incarceration from 1972 to 1977. At the age of twenty-one, he served time in Florence State Prison, a maximum-security prison in Arizona, convicted of dealing drugs. The memoir can be seen as an illustration of what it is like to be a bordered subject, a marginalized Chicano in the borderland. The first half of the memoir recounts Baca’s childhood and early adolescent life growing up in the barrios of New Mexico. His recounting of his early life is reminiscent of the racist border culture and the various socio-economic difficulties Chicanos/as experienced in the early twentieth century. He recalls the poverty of his parents, which leads to their divorce when he was five-years-old. His mother who was a daughter of a Spanish Comanchero lived on a ranch with no water, working “long hours outside in the unbearable cold winters and hot sand-blowing summers, milking cows, feeding pigs and horses, filing ax blades, and chopping wood” (9). His father was a poor “Mexican from a neighboring village, Estancia, whose parents were landless peasants” (10). Their marriage is one of constant strife and despair, which Baca attributes to the effect of poverty as well as the nativist and racist culture against Mexicans in the borderlands. When his “fair-skinned, green-eyed, and black haired” mother wanted to marry his Mexican father, her family disproved the marriage. After they were married, the family looked down on Baca’s father calling him “a damn Mexican” and blamed his mother “for dishonoring the family” (11). Worn down by what becomes a strained and unhappy marriage, Baca remembers his father as a man who wore “a pained expression and kept his head down,” turning to alcoholism to drown out the pain of his failed life. Much of this part of the narrative is filled with violent fights that eventually lead to

his mother's tragic betrayal and abandonment of her family. The tragic dissolution of Baca's family is not only illustrative of the destructive power of poverty but also border culture, especially the racial construction of Chicanas/os as aliens in their homes. Despite the fact that Baca's father was born and raised in Estancia, Baca's father struggles to find a job in the urban cities of Santa Fe and Albuquerque as a result of "the whites [looking] down on Mexicans" (12).

Not unlike Baca's father's struggles to fit in, Baca's writes of his childhood as a long series of rejections and encounters in which he is made to feel that he is a problem in his own home and community. The most traumatic of these is his mother's abandonment. By his own Spanish mother, he is treated as a problem, a threat to her quest for assimilation into whiteness. Baca remembers his mother's own rejection of her Spanish heritage when she is with Richard, the a "well-off gringo" she marries (10). Baca finds his mother many years later her abandonment of the family, he finds that she has made a home with Richard and is living an affluent life. When he meets his mother for the first time again as a school boy, he is devastated when she introduces him to her white family as a friend. In the larger narrative, his mother's rejection of him becomes one of the central events in his life that determines his view of assimilation as a form of betrayal. In pain, Baca repeats his father's fate turning to alcohol and drugs that eventually leads to his imprisonment later in the story. Underlying the disillusion by both Baca and his father is their family's own racial construction of their Mexican identity.

The first half of his narrative of his childhood is, first and foremost, a tragedy; it is a story of a family that tears itself apart. As such it provides an intimate look at the generational effect of the racist border culture, the way it can destroy Chicana/o families and communities in the region long after the colonization of the borderlands took place. In her groundbreaking work, Gloria Anzaldúa argues that in order to properly understand the border culture, the border must be seen

both as a concrete site as well as a metaphysical condition. As a concrete site, she refers to the Mexican-U.S. border where Chicanas/os are hunted down as illegal aliens. In this space, she writes that Chicanas/os are “prohibited and forbidden”: “Gringos in the U.S. Southwest consider the inhabitants of the borderlands transgressors, aliens—whether they possess documents or not whether they’re Chicanos, Indians or Blacks. Do not enter, trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, shot” (25). At the same time that the border refers to the actual geography, it signifies a metaphysical condition. In one of her poems, the border is imagined as a wound on her body: “1,950 mile-long open wound / dividing a pueblo, a culture, / running down the length of my body, / staking fence rods in my flesh, / splits me splits me / me raja me raja / This is my home / this thin edge of barbwire” (24-5). The collapsing of the border, her body, and home is not only a reminder of the history of the colonialization of the borderlands and its inhabitants but also a signifier of what it means to be policed and legally and culturally marked as an alien, a trespasser, and a threat in one’s homeland. The metaphor of the border as a wound, the image of the splitting of the body and home symbolizes what Anzaldúa refers to as “intimate terrorism,” the fear and oppression that can mark one’s home and culture (42).

In the memoir, we can read Baca’s family’s stories as an illustration of how the Chicanas/os felt the oppressive colonial history of the borderlands as intimate terrorism. For example, Baca’s mother’s story portrays the literal splitting up of the family. In the telling the story of his grandfather, Baca also gestures to the intimate terror of losing one’s family, community, and homeland. From his grandfather’s stories, Baca learns about the history of the Chicanos in the borderlands and how his grandfather valiantly fought against the invasion of the white settlers back in the nineteenth century: “My grandfather, Pedro Baca, told me—about those of our people who rode horses across the night prairie on raiding parties... trying to expel

the gringo intruders and recover the land stolen from our people” (7). Here, Baca alludes to the history of the unfair and often illegal dispossession the Chicana/o inhabitants experienced in New Mexico. Through his grandfather’s story, he tells the history of the socio-economic injustice suffered by his Chicano ancestors. Baca writes that Grandpa got sick due to the “chemicals sprayed on plants in the field where he had always worked” and working as a janitor, “his joints hurt with arthritis, his knees burned, and his back ached” (172). However, more than the physical hardship, what ultimately kills his Grandpa is “a broken heart”:

He would tell me stories on the way to school, about how he drove to the salt flats to load his wagon and trade the salt to Indians for fish, deerskins, and herbs. The simple times had changed, he said, and I knew what he meant. He saw what was happening to his family: Refugio and Damacio drinking every day, my mother leaving us, newcomers stealing our land and calling it homesteading. Ruined ranchers and farmers came and went through Grandma’s kitchen.... One by one, families were disappearing, and life as Grandpa had known it was changing, and he died of a broken heart. (172)

The metaphor of “broken heart” is illustrative of the nature of the oppression felt by Chicanas/os in the borderlands. Baca’s grandfather mourns over the loss of the times when his people were spiritually united through their homelands. What his grandfather mourned wasn’t the loss of the material land as much as the loss of one’s sense of belonging through one’s homeland, family, community, and culture. Grandpa’s “broken heart” is also comparable to Anzaldúa’s the metaphor of the split wound mentioned earlier. Both images are figural wounds signifying the symbolic bordering entailed in the dispossession of homeland.

Baca’s memoir is an exploration of his psycho-socially bordered subjectivity expressed through the topoi of geographical space. For instance, rather than people, Baca repeatedly uses the word “place” in the narrative of his time at the orphanage, detention centers, school, and most importantly the prison. Baca describes the detention center thus: “The cell is the only *place* they have for kids without families” (174). At school Baca writes that he mostly felt “out of

place” (27). In the narration of his imprisonment, he described prison as “a frightening and pain-racked *place*... (6); “It was a serious time in a serious *place*...” [emphasis mine] (3). The topoi of space allows Baca to illustrate the significance of places and spaces to name their subjects; in other words, his memoir can be seen as a narrative about places. For example, Baca shows what he means by symbolic bordering by collapsing the distinction between all the places he’s inhabited, the orphanage, the detention centers, and prison. At the age of seven, after his parent’s abandonment and his grandfather’s unexpected death, Baca becomes a ward of the state and spends most of his adolescent life in various orphanages and detention homes. Although the orphanage supposedly takes him in from the streets, he is reminded of his exclusion from society: “I’d begun to feel early on that the state and society at large considered me a stain on their illusion of a perfect America. In the American dream there weren’t supposed to be [poor Mexican] children going hungry or sleeping under bridges” (29). In his later stay at the youth detention centers, Baca points out the role that state institutions play in further alienating troubled youths. He describes the detention center as having bars not unlike prisons: “My parents never did come, and at thirteen years old I found myself behind bars for the first time, in a detention center for boys. The bars weren’t there to keep us in so much as to remind us that we weren’t really wanted anywhere else” (20). In the comparison of the detention center and prison, Baca emphasizes the social and symbolic bordering of these two barred institutions. Due to the social and symbolic bordering, the boys who go to the detention centers come out more psychosocially disconnected and wounded than when they went in.

Similarly, in the latter half of the memoir, the narrative of his arrest and incarceration is illustrative of how imprisonment functions as a process of symbolic bordering. The prison is a repetition of his earlier experiences of his childhood in the orphanage and the detention centers.

When arrested, Baca is without the knowledge of the criminal justice system nor proper assistance from a good caring lawyer. Through the arraignment, conviction, and sentencing, Baca's illiteracy attributes to his feelings of confusion and hopelessness. In the courtroom scenes, Baca describes the legal system as not only discriminatory against the poor and illiterate but also largely reductive of human values. Unable to assert his legal rights or voice his side of the story, he is convicted of possession of heroin with intent to distribute and sentenced to five years in a maximum-security prison in Arizona.

By tracing the alienation he experiences throughout his early childhood as an orphan to his adulthood in prison and he alludes to the role that various state institutions play in the formation of bordered subjects. The process by which he becomes a convict is described as having "a momentum all of its own" (101). He criticizes the system of definitive sentencing that was in practice at the time. He was sentenced in what was called "flat time," which required the convict to serve the full length of his time. In this type of sentencing, which had come into effect during the sentencing reform of the 1970s, the practice of early release through probation and parole was made impossible. Designed specifically to incapacitate offenders, the measure came about as a result of the increasingly negative perception of criminals and the possibility of their rehabilitation. He spends many of those five years in solitary as well as in a mental ward where he is heavily drugged. Referring to such punitive measures of the criminal justice and correctional system, Baca claims, there is "no sentiment or discretion" (101). Without the possibility of reducing his time with good behavior, Baca's perception of the system was that it did not allow any agency on the part of those it supposedly aimed to "correct."

In his narrative of his time in prison, the theme of metaphysical imprisonment is repeated. Baca describes prison as a place of emotional and mental suffering—even more than the

physical—incapacitating inmates’ will and their sense of identity. In thinking about the psychosocial nature of imprisonment, Gloria Anzaldúa’s description of the borderland is useful to consider. For example, in her use of the term, it is both a place as well as a state of mind:

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. Los *atravesados* [troublemakers] live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the “normal”.... Tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus. Ambivalence and unrest reside there.... (26)

Here, the borderland is not only physical but socially bordered space that is an “unsafe” territory designed to segregate and “distinguish” the socially “prohibited and forbidden.” It is both a space as well as a state of mind created by the bordered nature of the space, creating “tension,” “ambivalence,” and “unrest.” According to Anzaldúa, the consequence of being “bordered” is destructive and damaging psychologically. In other words, being in the space of borderland is to not only feel imprisoned, but also afraid and unsafe. She writes that the consequences of living in a borderland or a bordered state are “psychological,” “sexual,” and “spiritual.” To be on the border is to be imprisoned, “[separated] in cells” and the pathos of its space are “hated” and “anger” as well as “alienation,” “panic,” and “paralysis” (42). It reaches deep into one’s unconscious and distorts one’s sense of self.

In the memoir, Baca’s description of the bordered space of prison is endowed with similar pathos. He points out how prison almost made him into a “monster” and “zombie”: “If I had stayed longer in the dungeon, who knows what kind of person I might have become” (210); “[my] memories were saving me from becoming a zombie in this place...” (149); “it filled me with bitter awareness that being in prison could turn a man into a monster” (190); “It’s the kind

of rage that can only be created in prison” (191). Throughout the narrative, Baca repeatedly emphasizes the psychological suffering of the inmates, which is described as a kind of a spiritual paralysis caused by hurt and fear. Soon after he arrives in prison, what characterizes his experience are feelings of fear, tension, and unrest. In what is a harrowing depiction, the prison is portrayed as a place of ultimate dispossession, alienation, and hopelessness. Not unlike his adolescent days at the detention center, he finds that he can’t escape fighting. In one scene, Baca starts receiving threats from a particularly violent gang called La eMe and seeks advice from an older inmate who describes the gangs as products of imprisonment thus:

It happens to all of us who stay here past a certain time. You do your time; then you do more and more, and the hurt in the heart turns to bitterness, freedom turns to vengeance, and you look forward to getting out, not to resume your life but to hurt people the way they hurt you, for punishment that made no sense, for the hurting and hurting, for the day when you couldn’t take it anymore but you had to and lost your humanity, lost your reason for wanting to be a human being. The day you just fell into line, knowing this is where you’d live and die. (130-1)

Here, Macaron’s description of the inmates is reminiscent of the boys Baca had encountered at detention centers who were not only hurt and withdrawn, but also violent and unfeeling. After witnessing a violent fight in the dining room, Baca realizes that he “too would be trained to feel nothing” if he stayed at the detention center. On the one hand, Baca’s description depicts these places as unseemly and violent; on the other hand, Baca also attempts to humanize his presentation of the places, which we see in his focus on the suffering of the inmates and the boys. In the narrative of these two places, the dehumanization is the product of the place and not the people.

In the memoir, the use of the trope of space, place, and border is both literal and figural. Baca emphasizes the symbolic bordering of incarceration throughout the narrative and presents incarceration as an extension of other forms of symbolic bordering he’s experienced in life as

well as witnessed in his family and community. In one scene, Baca describes the memory of his father's imprisonment when Baca was five-years-old:

In time I would become all too familiar with such places, not only with those very same cells down on Garcia Street but with a long string of others as well, on different if equally dusty streets, with different but similar jailers, different but similar men.... Whether I was approaching it or seeking escape from it, jail always defined in some way the measure of my life.... As I grew up, my own eyes came to reflect those of these drunks, addicts, and beggars, those grieving men, women, and children and their stories. It was the same despair I had seen through the bars in my father's eyes, the same story. (3)

Baca's lyrical language shifts back and forth from the literal and figural. Through the witnessing of his father in prison, he foreshadows the tragic trajectory of his adult life in prison. What he implies here is the literal passing down of his father's incarceration. The nefarious effect of being a bordered subject transcends generational differences. At the same time, the metaphor of imprisonment symbolizes the different manifestations of bordered subjectivity Baca's witnessed in his family and community. In the passage below, Baca extends the metaphor of imprisonment and see the "bars in [his] father eyes" reflected in the eyes of his Chicano ancestors in the borderlands:

Again and again I recalled the wasted features of the prisoners, the faraway eyes, pleading to be let out, gazing at me as if from a distant place.... Over the years I encountered all of them: eyes filled with raging despair, with weary despair, with insane despair; eyes with despair of an old man who can no longer fight injustice; eyes filled with the dark despair of terror or mental illness; the anguished eyes of a child weeping in a corner. (2-3)

Here, the devastation of witnessing the despair of his father behind bars reminds him of the tragic stories of his ancestors. The psycho-socially bordered subjectivity of the prisoners is one and the same with the Chicano ancestors who had similar eyes as his father's, gesturing to the psycho-social imprisonment of the socio-economic marginalization of Chicanos. If Baca's father

is already metaphysically imprisoned in his alcoholism, Baca is also in his addiction and illiteracy.

The theme of belonging helps Baca further map the psychic terrain of a bordered subject. Baca relays his feelings of psycho-social imprisonment and alienation through his search for a place where he feels a sense of belonging:

No, prison was not new to me when I arrived at Florence; I had been preparing for it from an early age. I had visited it a thousand times in the screams of my father and my drunken uncles, in the tight-lipped scolding of my mother, in the shrill reprimands of the nuns at Saint Anthony's orphanage; in all the finger-pointing adults who told me I didn't belong, I didn't fit in, I was a deviant. Security guards and managers followed me in store aisles; Anglo housewives walking toward me clutched their purses as I passed.... Feeling inferior in a white world, alien and ashamed, I longed for another place to live outside society" (4).

Baca refers to the historical treatment of Chicanos as "un-American" and illustrates the importance of belongingness in the constitution of one's civic identity; in other words, he points out the importance of acceptance, involvement, and belonging as a central component of one's experience of citizenship. In the above passage, Baca portray incarceration as a physical manifestation of the life-long social marginalization he experienced growing up. In this way, we see that the memoir is not only about Baca's story of his imprisonment but also an exploration of his life experience using the topoi of borders and/or the spatially bordered space of prison.

"SCHOOL WASN'T ANYTHING I EXPECTED": THE BORDERING PRACTICE OF NATIONAL LITERACY PEDAGOGY

Explicit in Baca's criticism of the colonial history of the borderlands and bordered subjectivity is the important role of language practices. The memoir can be seen as a literacy narrative, a subgenre in autobiographies or memoirs that "trace personal growth and development with special attention to an individual's relationship to language or literacy" (Young 13). According to Morris Young, literacy narratives such as Carlos Bulosan's *America Is*

in the Heart (1946), Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976), Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (1982), and Victor Villanueva's *Bootstraps: from an American Academic of Color* (1993) (13), are explorations of the complicated intersectionality between language use and national identity. In the case of Baca's memoir, however, the intersectionality is even further complicated in his exploration of language use, national identity, and incarceration.

The memoir charts Baca's journey coming into language and the discovery of the power of writing in transcending the conditions of psycho-social imprisonment he describes throughout the narrative. Set in the 1950s New Mexico, Baca's narrative alludes to the complex role that language played in the formation of the racist border culture of the borderlands and in the experience of his national and civic identity. Baca's early childhood encounters with language must be interpreted in the context of colonial history of that region, specifically, the way in which the English-only movement constituted a bordering practice that marked the non-English speaking inhabitants as outsiders, un-American, and unassimilable. According to Barrera, the post-war era marked a period of heightened exploitation of Chicanas/os in the borderlands. The influx of temporary contract laborers from Mexico changed the demographics of the region and resulted in the increased presence of poor, working-class, Spanish-speaking students. During this period, the increasing stereotyping of Mexicans and Chicanas/os as menial laborers, lazy, dirty, illiterate and illegal was a serious problem. Similar discriminations were prevalent within the public school systems against Spanish-speaking students.

According to Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr., school educators treated Chicano students as racially inferior and objected to the use of Spanish language. Furthermore, low academic achievement by working-class Spanish-speaking students was largely explained with the "myth

of underachievement based on language barriers” (86). Various literacy research erroneously linked bilingualism as an indication of low school achievement. It was common for schools to have no-Spanish policies, which created an oppressive culture in which teachers often openly penalized students when catching them speak Spanish. During the El Movimiento during 1960s, an important part of the protest was the argument against such practices that construed Chicana/o culture and language as inferior. Along with the social protests, within the field of literacy, researchers and teachers began re-examining the myth of underachievement of bilingual students. A major breakthrough occurred when the National Education Association of the United States published a report entitled “The Invisible Minority” in 1966. In it, the low academic achievement by Spanish-speaking students are attributed to English-only movements. Similarly in 1974, the College Composition and Communication published a resolution entitled “Student’s Right to Their Own Language” exclaiming that literacy pedagogy must be based on the acceptance of students’ language and dialects and the affirmation of their diverse heritage and identities.³

³In addition to calling for the acceptance of students’ own language and dialects, the resolution also exhorted the composition community to reexamine the social role of literacy. Since the publication of the resolution, scholars such as James Paul Gee, Harvey J. Graff, and Deborah Brandt to name a few broke grounds in literacy research and brought on what is sometimes termed the “social turn” in literacy research. The proliferation of literacy research from 1970s to the 1990s radically changed the perception of literacy. In his groundbreaking 1979 work, *The Literacy Myth*, Harvey J. Graff debunks what he calls the legacy of literacy, the strong belief in the function of literacy in social progress. Despite the radical claims, the success of Graff’s work on the literacy myth opened the door for other scholars to study the social impact of various myths and legacies of literacy, which were often “violent” and “damaging.” Scholars like Leon Botstein, Elspeth Stuckey, and Gloria Anzaldúa have used terms such as “damaged literacy,” “the violence of literacy,” and “linguistic terrorism,” in order to refer to the ways that “unmediated, abstract and universal” practices of literacy functioned to marginalize various “persons, societies, and civilizations” (Graff 19).

Some of the social and political issues of English-only policies are expressed through the trope of racial awakening in the literacy narratives set in the borderlands. For instance, Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* and Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands: The New Mestiza* describe their encounters with no-Spanish policies in public schools. In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa writes of the time when she was "caught speaking Spanish at recess," which was "good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler" (75). She claims that such acts constituted an attack on her "home" language and made her feel ashamed of herself: "Repeated attacks on our native tongue diminish our sense of self" (80). Referring to the racial oppression of the English-only policy as "linguistic terrorism," she points out how such encounters deeply impacted the formation of her race, gender, and national identity. In *Hunger for Memory*, Rodriguez tells the story of how acquisition of English literacy allows him to assimilate and consequently overcome the impoverished conditions of his working-class Mexican background; at the same time, it is described as a painful process of assimilation that entails an erasure of his identity:

Without question, it would have pleased me to hear my teachers address me in Spanish when I entered the classroom. I would have felt much less afraid. I would have trusted them and responded with ease. But it would have delayed—for how long postponed?—having to learn the language of public society. I would have evaded—and for how long could I have afforded to delay?—learning the great lesson of school, that I had a public identity. (19)

Although assimilation earns him "a public identity" and legitimacy as a citizen, it also comes at the price of losing his family and ethnic heritage as Rodriguez details in the memoir. In these narratives, literacy is a complex practice through which ethnic writers express their "anxiety and

nostalgia” about assimilation but as such also informs one’s understanding of his/her racial identity (Young 6).⁴

Their narratives suggest that literacy practices are far from universal; it is more than a neutral technic, skill, or grammar. Rather it is a social practice, “always embedded in social constructed epistemological principles: the ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity, and being...” (Street 61). They constitute local, social, historical, and ideological practices and thus, are also intimately connected to the various social ways of being such as racial, gender, and national identities (Gee, Graff, Brandt, Street, Stuckey, and Ivanič). Literacy is a “[way] of being in the world... as forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, and beliefs, attitudes and social identities...” (Gee 127). Thus, literacy is a deeply social practice and constitutive of ways of being.

In the memoir, *A Place to Stand*, Baca’s accounting of his childhood growing up in a bilingual home weaves in social and political critiques of language use. Baca’s lack of development in literacy includes childhood anecdotes about speaking two different languages that are used at home and in public. At home, Baca grows up speaking only Spanish with his grandparents and unable to speak English. Similar to Richard Rodriguez’s experience, Baca must learn English in order to go to school. This prevents Baca from wanting to go to school where only English is spoken: “I’m always complaining that I’m too sick to attend school, and my grandparents indulge me. Besides, I can only speak Spanish, and Grandma is against speaking English” (138). Baca’s dislike for school is compounded by his mother’s traumatic

⁴See Ana Celia Zentella’s *Growing up Bilingual: Puerto Rican Children in New York* for her analysis of Spanglish, which she argues is reflective of “the community members’ attempts to construct a positive self within a broader political economy and historical context that defines them categorically as a negative ‘other’” (271).

abandonment. He recalls the earlier encounters with his mother before she leaves him, the way she used to instruct him to quit speaking in Spanish in order to be more “American.” These moments that take place only when Anglo Richard is around become one of the central moments of Baca’s racial awakening. In her desire to impress Richard with her white ways, Baca’s mother would “point to white-skinned, blue-eyed children and say [he] should be like them” (14). In his retelling, Baca reads into these moments as his mother’s rejection of her own Spanish heritage but more importantly, they foreshadow her eventual her abandonment of Baca. When Baca goes to school, he drops out not only because the language he encounters at school is different from what he knew at home but also because he is reminded of his mother’s rejection of him:

School wasn’t anything like I expected. With a week I faked being sick in order to stay out. The real reason was I was ashamed, not only of my old patched clothes but also because I didn’t know anything the teachers were talking about. I couldn’t talk to the kids because... [they] were the kind of kids my mother pointed to, saying I should be like them. (24)

Here, Baca’s rejection of school and the chance to learn to read and write are attributed to something other than the difference in his home and school language. Entangled with the trauma of his mother’s betrayal, Baca comes to see language as being more than a set of skills; it becomes intimately tied to his critical perception of his mother’s assimilation to whiteness. This can be seen in another scene when Baca rejects the opportunity to be adopted by Coach Tracy: “there was no way I could let myself be adopted into a white family.... I’d be like my mother then, turning my back on my people... and living a lie about who I really was” (29). In fear that he would become like his mother, that he might forget where he came from, he rejects the chance to live a better life. Thus we see that although Baca’s illiteracy is a condition to be overcome in the narrative, he also rejects various opportunities to escape that condition. What is implicit in his rejection of school and adoption is a criticism of the notion of assimilation that entails the

forgetting of one's past and heritage. Most importantly, it illustrates how Baca's struggle with illiteracy and later incarceration were symptomatic of the larger psycho-social bordering of Chicanas/os.

In the narrative, the social questions that Baca raises in the memoir in relation to language are not only specific to the colonial history of the borderlands but also the contemporary practices of the legal system. Throughout the narrative, Baca criticizes the exclusionary practice of legal discourse. In one scene, Baca recalls how Mieyo, his brother was raped by "two older white men" who used the law to silence Mieyo: "He thought they were simply being kind, but they raped him and used legal jargon to threaten him. He would go to prison for prison for breaking and entering they said. They would accuse him of robbing them. Besides, who would believe a young Chicano kid anyway" (33). Similarly, when Baca is arrested, he feels excluded due to his lack of understanding of the legal discourse: "I was ignorant of court procedures and intimidated by legal jargon. The truth was, I was more panicked by having rights then losing them. Dreading what [the lawyer] threatened they might do to me, I felt there was no way out" (92). In both of these scenes, Baca and his brother fear the power of the discourse they don't understand and those who use it like a weapon. To Baca, the law can be used to give as well as rob people of rights by those in power. For example, in the story of his grandparents, he alludes to the history of the borderlands that saw to the dispossession of homelands via the manipulation of the laws:

Ever since I could remember, my Baca grandparents mistrusted whites. When they came to Grandma's with official papers, we hid in the back rooms.... When Grandpa was under the tree by the fences with his friends, I'd hear them talk about whites who used lawyers to pass laws to steal land or intimidate poor folks with their money. (14-5)

Baca implies that to those who speak the specialized language, the law is merely a type of discourse, which can be manipulated. However, to those who are excluded, it also a means by which they are ascribed, named, and bordered.

The memoir seen as a literacy narrative can be read as an exploration of the various literacy practices that contributed to the bordering of Chicanas/os. Through different encounters with various literacy practices, Baca paints a nuanced picture of the process of his coming to language. In other words, his story is an endorsement of literacy that is very specific in its criticism of the various institutional practices. In addition to the discriminatory pedagogy in schools and the use of legal discourse, he also criticizes history as another discriminatory use of discourse. In “the stately documents” of nation’s history, he argues that the “stories of his ancestors are missing. Her writes in one of the excerpted poems in the memoir: “I lived on like an insect / Through all the writers and artists of America / Who never wrote my story, / Through all the stately documents deceiving my ancestors...” (225). Baca criticizes the “writers and artists of America” whose official history books exclude and misrepresent Chicano peoples.

The exclusion of Chicano history from the official documents is not unlike his view of the way that criminal justice system functions. Just as the stories of his peoples were missing from official history, his story is missing from his case file. Baca writes that the criminal justice system is like an impersonal “machine” that reduces its citizens to a “number” on a “paper” (101; 27). He writes that, as an offender to be tried, he was also a “number on a case file in an office,” a “piece of property with official papers attached” (27). This is contrasted with the indigenous worldview and values of communalism reinforced and expressed in the tradition of story-telling. He writes about how he “never owned a book and had no desire to own one,” but he liked telling and sharing stories. It was one of two ways he learned things: “hanging out with homies and

listening to their stories” (100). Here, in the juxtaposing of “official” literacies of the law and history with the type of literacy based on communalism and sharing, we can see yet a glimpse of the way that the theme of the psycho-social bordering and belongingness informed his narrative.

“I WRAPPED MYSELF IN THIS COCOON OF LANGUAGE”: TRANSCENDING THE WALLS OF PRISON

In the memoir, the theme of metaphysical imprisonment is visible in Baca’s understanding of language, especially the power of writing in inventing a sense of belonging. In an interview, Baca once explained the significance of writing in a place like prison: “[In] a place like prison where all sensory enjoyment was deprived, language became more real, more tangible than bars or concrete.... So I began to read, to read and write in the sense that, metaphorically, I wrapped myself in this cocoon of language” (Keene 34). To Baca, writing became a way to transcend the borders of prison. For example, in the memoir, he writes that his love for writing began as a “defense against the numbing effects of isolation time in the hole, which usually numbed a prisoner’s desire to fight to stay human” (149). In the solitary confinement where he spent months at a time, he recounts how he wrote in his mind, “revisiting places and people from his past for longer stretches of time” (134). He writes that these images were from his past, the only source he can draw from, but they were “fresh as anything he could dream up” and that the vividness of these images provided him with the sensory stimulation and human connection, two most basic human needs prohibited in prison. These writings of his past weave in and out throughout the latter section of his memoir where he recalls his time in Florence State prison. In many ways, the harshness of prison is relayed through these imaginary excursions of Baca’s mind and the longing he conveys through them. He writes that the images he wrote helped him reconstruct a sense of belonging and thus, a sense of identity and well-being. In the bordered place of prison, he discovers writing as a way in which he can transcend

the physical walls of his cell. In this way, an important part of Baca's portrayal of prison as a borderland involves his resistance to the dehumanizing effects of prison through writing. He would "play a memory like a song, over and over, adding this or subtracting that, changing something in a scene or re-creating a certain episode and enhancing it with details" (139). He writes that the more he wrote, the more detailed, concrete, and forceful the "imaginary excursions" became:

Stretched out flat on my back, arms covering my eyes, I would replay the events over and over again like a sexual fantasy, adding details and names, redrawing faces, until they seemed as real to me as if they were right in front of me.... I found myself lingering more and more on images of Estancia, the small village where my grandparents lived, all by itself in the vast prairie.... I could see my grandparent's small brown stucco house.... I'd ever gone into my memories so vividly before. I felt more outside my cell than in it. (134)

Baca argues that being able to write in this way became a way in which he was able to resist the mind-numbing and dehumanizing conditions of isolation and to transcend the bordering of his identity in prison. Reading the passages of his mental excursions, the readers can't help but feel Baca's love, reverence, and communion with mother earth and most importantly, through these excursions, feel the pain of his loss he experienced in being incarcerated. In other words, the narrative's juxtaposition of nature and the outdoors against the man-made prison provides a stark contrast between the underlying values of those two places.

The effect that he achieves through the excursions of his imaginary writing is very specific. He uses memoir-writing as an epistemological practice that helps him discover and invent a sense of belonging. In the memoir, we see Baca embodying "alternative ways of being" through his memoir-writing. He writes, "Language placed my life experiences in a new context... from which new associations arose to engage me in present life in a more purposeful way" (Baca 240). Baca's rhetoric of belonging reframes his own convict identity, which is

constructed by the state as a mere number and a court case to be expedited. He writes, “[language] was a resource that... opened the way toward a future that was based not on fear or bitterness or apathy but on compassionate involvement and a belief that I belonged” (5). In other words, “compassionate involvement and a belief of belonging” is a step toward agency, change, and ultimately, a deeper sense of freedom besides physical freedom (5). Creating “a place to stand” i.e. a sense of belonging is the route to finding freedom from the “vague and undetermined place” of borderlands (Baca; Anzaldúa).

In this way, the memoir is an endorsement of literacy and an appeal to the incarcerated to find their own places to stand and to recover their sense of social and civic identity through writing:

Psychic wounds don’t come in the form of knives, blades, guns, clubs; they arrive in the form of boxes—boxes in trucks, under beds, in my apartment when I could no longer pay the rent and had to move.... I was a witness for those who for one reason or another would never have a place of their own, would never have the opportunity to make their lives stable enough because resources weren’t available or because they just could not get it together. My job was to witness and record the “it” of their lives, to celebrate those who don’t have a place in this world to stand and call home. For those people, my journals, poems, and writings are home. My pen and heart chronicle their hopes, doubts, regrets, loves, despairs, and dreams. I do this partly out of selfishness, because it helps to heal my own impermanence, my own despair. My role as witness is to give voice to the voiceless and hope to the hopeless, of which I am one. (244)

Here, Baca’s conception of the “psychic wound” of incarceration is similar to the psychosocial bordering experienced by Chicana/os in the borderlands; it is more akin to the intimate terrorism described by Gloria Anzaldúa as an effect of the dispossession of one’s home. It is to become “voice-less” and “hopeless” because to be without a “place to call home” is to feel impermanent, contradictory, and ambivalent. At the same time, Baca gestures to how the power of writing helped heal the “psychic wound” that he suffered growing up in a broken home. Writing was one way in which Baca was not only able to reconcile his ambivalence he felt about his family but

also to finally see the place he is standing in the world. Baca's desire for his memoir to serve as a kind of witnessing can be understood in this light. To those who are incarcerated and thus feel ambivalent about their place in the world, his story serves as a kind of witness, a recognition of their feelings of impermanence as well as the possibility of carving out a place where they belong.

As such, Baca's prison memoir functions by recreating a kind of homeland in the similar way that Aztlán functioned in *El Movimiento*. Through the invocation of the mythic homeland of Aztlán, the movement poets not only protested the exploitative socioeconomic and cultural hegemony in the borderlands, but most importantly created a sense of nationalism, a political solidarity, and belonging between various indigenous people in the borderlands. Similarly, Baca creates a sense of belonging by writing beautiful depictions of his home: "The village was nestled under a grove of scattered cottonwoods, in the flatlands to the southeast of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. I could see my grandparents' small brown stucco house, the wind-swept dirt yard, and the barnlike-shed" (134). Many similar passages fill Baca's writing in prison and in these writings, his home as well as surrounding nature, open spaces, and the land are depicted. The depictions function in the similar way that the invocation of the mythical mestizo nation symbolized the spiritual union of Chicanos.

Baca creates a sense of belonging through connecting to his Chicano heritage, especially the lands and Mother Earth from which his ancestors drew their sense of identity. Throughout the memoir, Baca's remembrance of his family is always within the setting of the land. In the following passage, we see Baca remember his Grandpa:

Outside, I walk alongside Grandpa, carrying his black lunch pail in the red wagon I pull behind us. He's wearing his crumpled fedora and threadbare suit coat over bib overalls. The land sparkles with dew.... He looks at the clear sky and land and

houses all around and slaps his chest lightly to indicate how he loves the dawn. I do the same. When I'm with him like this, life is beautiful. (137)

In this passage, there is a strong sense of communion that Grandpa shares with the land. At the same time, Baca draws his sense of identity and strength from the remembrance of his Grandpa and his love for the land.

Throughout the memoir, Baca writes about his home and family, which he depicts as a part of a larger ethnic community. For instance, in one of the memory sequences, he writes about the fiesta of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. There he remembers learning about the La Virgen de Guadalupe and the history of El Mestizo and La Raza. He learns the history of the Guadalupana image, which has been the national symbol of Mexico throughout the 19th and 20th century. Baca describes how he was “filled with a serene, communal sense of belonging:

I felt all my people, felt them deep in the hard work they did, in faint and delicate red-weed prairie flowers, in the arguments over right and wrong, in my people's irascible desire to live, which was mine as well. I felt their will was growing inside me and would ultimately let me be free as the wind. (153)

Here, the longing for nature must be seen within the context of Baca's conception of being a bordered subject and thus his desire to recover his sense of social identity. In his description, we can see that Baca's sense of identity and well-being is described as intimately tied to Mother Earth. In one passage, the wind carries the spirits of people, his ancestors, as well as the other inanimate elements of Mother Earth like the land and grass:

I felt the many lives that had come before me, the wind carrying within the vast space of the range, and all that lived in the range—cows, grass, insects—but something deeper.... The breeze excites larks to jackknife over the park pond, knocks on doors to ask people to remember their ancestors... (152)

In the rest of the passage, Baca describes the wind as an entity in its own right: “This breeze blows on my brow sometimes when I'm on the prairie, and I feel immortal; it whispers.... The

breeze chases the young heels of children and pulls at little girls' ponytails... scruffs youths up, tugs at old women's long-sleeved bereavement dresses, sweeps away veils and handkerchiefs and dries their tears" (152). Here, the wind is an important part of the community that plays with young children and dries the tears of old women. The difference between humans and nature, animate and inanimate elements are not only blurred, but most importantly, they are recreated as co-existing harmoniously.

In conclusion, through his beautifully written lyrical prose, Baca expresses the devastation prison causes in the psyche of those imprisoned, thus offering an insight into the nature of the problem in ways that are difficult to relay in an argumentative genre. In this way, the memoir form allows a critique of the larger penal system focused on the experience of the imprisoned. By using borders as a topoi, Baca is able to focus on the pathos of prison space, illustrating the ways in which the inmates are made to feel inhabiting its space. Lastly, Baca uses his story of illiteracy and imprisonment as a model in appealing to the incarcerated for the need for literacy in transcending various bordered conditions. Writing not only allows Baca to imagine himself out of the walls of his cell, but also, it allows him to connect with his ethnic community. Baca shows how being part of a community is what allows him to transcend the psychosocial bordering he's experienced as a minority and a convict.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

As illustrated in my study, prison writings are works of social and civic protest that speak out about the injustices of prison. In *Soul on Ice*, Eldridge Cleaver uses his past as a way to examine and speak out about the ways in which he was formed within the tragic history of violence against black men. By probing into his own psychological neurosis, he interrogates the history in which black men were terrorized through the unspeakable horror of lynching and state-sanctioned violence, imprisonment, and execution through the penal system. In addition to the personal confession, he uses multiple genres to address divergent audiences. Through the black jeremiad, he calls on black readers, especially young black men to reflect on the effects of racial stereotypes of black masculinity such as the criminal Buck and Uncle Tom and urges them to overcome the cycle of violence imposed on them through these damaging stereotypes. Ultimately, however, the provocative and violent rendition of black masculinity in the text undermines his efforts to speak for the criminalized black men. In his inability to invent an alternative model of black masculinity outside the stereotypes, he falls short in reconciling the racial trauma that his protest calls to attention.

In *Live from Death Row*, Mumia Abu-Jamal uses his prison writing to protest the continual criminalization and killing of black male bodies approximately thirty years post-Civil Rights era (and the radical hyper-masculine outlaw rhetoric of Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*). Using the techniques of journalism, Abu-Jamal protests against many of the same problems of racism in the penal and criminal justice systems—especially the state-sanctioned execution of black men. Unlike Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*, which in many ways plays into the confessional and therapeutic

expectations of prison writing, Abu-Jamal's *Live from Death Row* removes the focus on the individual and takes it to a level of community. Although facing execution, he positions himself as an observer or witness and effectively portrays prison as an important part of the community that is made invisible by censorship and corruption. Overall, Abu-Jamal is able to create a rhetoric of protest that is more community-oriented, moving it beyond the cycle of violence and trauma experienced by the imprisoned.

Lastly, in *A Place to Stand*, Jimmy Santiago uses his prison writing to dismantle the social and cultural borders experienced by the imprisoned; in other words, he illustrates the power of language to transcend the physical as well as the metaphysical conditions of imprisonment that continue to alienate and silence them. By calling on fellow inmates to practice writing that creates a sense of belonging, he offers an argument against the alienating and divisive practices of the modern penitentiary. *A Place to Stand* is the most lyrical and thus least argumentative in form out of the three examples; nevertheless, it constitutes a highly social and political text that imparts important arguments about the bordered nature of prison.

Thus, in addition to the important and insightful arguments they assert about prison, these texts are also illustrative of the constraints imposed on them as imprisoned writers. All three draw from, blend in, and reuse forms of civic writings such as the black jeremiad, journalism, and Chicana/o protest, defying the expectations of prison writing as works of personal reflection and therapy. As such, they are works that attempt to dismantle the social divide experienced by the imprisoned and make prison a part of the community by making prison visible to the public. In this regard, Cleaver's rhetoric is the least successful out of the three examples. His rhetoric of black masculinity is an attempt to speak for the imprisoned, however, he ends up writing a violent manifesto that alienates women and white readers as well as presents a damaging

portrayal of black criminality. In comparison, Abu-Jamal and Baca's works made for stronger and more persuasive arguments for prison advocacy. Their use of news-writing and trope of the border reveal communities separated not only by bars and concrete walls but also the conceptual gulf that exists between the perception of prison and the actualities of incarceration practice. By first tackling the perceptual gulf, these works are able to work toward accurately representing prison and at the same time, crafting rhetorics that emphasize communal responsibility on both sides of the wall in their call for justice.

Overall, my hope for this project is that it not only gives voice to the three individual prison writers, Cleaver, Abu-Jamal, and Baca, but become a starting point for more studies that examine prison writings outside the confessional and therapeutic paradigm. The view of prison writings as works confined to the personal further obscures the space of prison. Approaching prison writings as critical works of social critique and protest constitutes an important step toward addressing the crimes against humanity perpetuated in prison as well as larger social problems of mass incarceration. In 2008, "[f]or the first time in the nation's history," a *New York Times* article reported, "more than one in 100 Americans are behind bars..." (par1). This represents an unprecedented rate of incarceration in U.S. history. In 1975, the number of prisoners was roughly around 400,000. Currently, the United States incarcerates the highest number of its citizens in the world with more than 2.2 million people in federal, state, and local prisons (King R).

At the same time, various misunderstandings about prison continue to persist in our society. One of the most detrimental of these is the misunderstanding that mass incarceration is good for society, that prisons are keeping our society safe by locking away violent perpetrators of crime. On the contrary, various studies suggest that the impact of imprisonment on crime

control is marginal at best (King). Furthermore, it has been argued that prison functions like a “revolving door” with majority of prisoners struggling to reenter society upon their release. In 2011, the recidivism rate of prisoners who return to prison within three years was more than 40 percent (Pew Center on the States). Deep-seated myths distort our understandings about prison, especially the function of prison in society.

In arguing for the eventual obsolescence of prisons in our society, Angela Davis points out how the difficulty with such reform rests in the ways that people take prisons for granted. She notes that people find it “difficult to imagine a life without [prisons]” and feel they know all there is to know about them (Davis, *Are Prisons*, 15). At the same time, as is often the case with things we take for granted, the prison is close yet far. Davis observes that people are reluctant to “face the realities hidden within [prisons]” (15). For example, prison activists have described the public neglect of the human rights violations in prison by comparing it to the ominous silence that had preceded the atrocities of German holocaust and American slavery. Buzz Alexander writes:

The context of *Is William Martinez Not Our Brother?* is the mass incarceration of American citizens and its devastating effect on countless neighborhoods, families, and millions of American- and foreign-born children. The context is the “invisibility” of this incarceration for most Americans and the silence in our suburbs and in our schools, colleges, and universities. When millions of people were criminalized through new laws and taken from their homes and disappeared in Germany of the 1930s, when the United States continued to brutalize slaves and split slave families apart in the 1840s and 1850s... there was the same invisibility, and the same silence in safe places, including the academy. (11)

Here, Alexander’s comparison of the U.S prisons to the holocaust and slavery elucidates the urgency of the problem of prison’s “invisibility” and “silence.” As the prison writers of this study argue in their memoirs, what prisoners undergo in the prison system consists of various

human-rights violations. The conditions under which the prisoners live are often unsafe and inhumane.

Numerous claims of human-rights violations have been made by prisoners in the past fifty years. For example, in the 2011 Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Plata*, California state prisoners claimed that the lack of medical service, which has resulted in a number of inmate deaths, was a violation of the eighth Amendment's ban on cruel and inhumane punishment. In this class-action lawsuit by prisoners, other medical maltreatment and neglect were identified and the court ruled in favor of the prisoners ultimately finding the overcrowding of prisons a violation of the 8th Amendment's ban on cruel and unusual punishment. However, despite the ruling that affirmed the human-rights violation of mass incarceration, what is notable about this incident, however, is that it was characteristic of the ways in which the fundamental social problems of mass incarceration get shrouded in arguments for more prisons. At the time, the findings that indicated the extreme extent of the overcrowding in the prisons in the state of California had led the then governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, to describe it as a "state emergency." Although the allegations in the case dealt with serious human-rights violations in the current correctional system, the case ultimately failed to address the central issue at hand. Finding the California prison system largely deficient for the vast number of people the state incarcerates, "the court ordered the release of enough prisoners so that the inmate population would come within 137.5 percent of the prisons' total design capacity" (Oyez "*Brown v. Plata*," para. 1). In the end, the superficial remedies were applied in order to meet the established quota of inmates. California state responded by shifting their prisoner population from state prisons to county jails and the socio-economic problems of growing population of incarcerated citizens, racial injustices of current incarceration practice, and the unconstitutional conditions of prisons

remained the same (Schlanger 185). Similarly, in her influential work on prison, Angela Davis calls attention to the problematic “absence of critical positions on prison expansion in the political arena” (*Are Prisons*, 20). For instance, she points to the curious ways in which the prison-industrial-complex, the privatization of the prison industry in the 1980s and 90s, prisonized the landscape of California largely unimpeded by the public (14). Davis describes the illusiveness of prison as a “black hole,” referring to the way that it functions as a physical and ideological space in which “undesirables are deposited...” (16). Despite the fact that the increasing trend in incarceration poses an undeniable problem, the public has been largely silent on the issue.

In addition to the mass incarceration and its problems of human rights, corruption and racial discrimination in the criminal justice and penal system continue to be cloaked in invisibility. Davis points out, despite the statistical and historical evidence to the contrary, the presence of racism in the penal and criminal justice system is still largely a hidden social issue. According to Davis, the lack of public interest functions ideologically to “relieve us of the responsibility of thinking about the real issues,” such as the socio-economic disparity and inequality experienced by minority Americans (16). According to the 2006 study by the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Program, African-American men comprise of approximately 40 percent of all males incarcerated in federal and state prisons and local jails. Seen across the racial demographics, about 4.8 percent out of the general population of African-American men, 1.9 percent of Hispanic men, and .7 percent of white men were in prison (Sabol). Despite the fact that alarming numbers of African-American men make up the majority population in prisons nationwide, public discourses do not recognize the current overuse and

overcrowding of the nation's prisons as a problem of race, particularly as a social problem affecting men of color.

A number of studies have posited the claim that U.S. prisons are racially driven institutions. According to scholars such as Bruce Franklin and Angela Davis, the U.S. prison system traces its earliest development to the late nineteenth-century chain gangs. Douglas A. Blackmon's work *Slavery by Another Name* offers a historical study of post-Emancipation periods revealing that laws specifically aimed at recently freed slaves were designed to funnel them into chain gangs, which white plantations owners exploited as laborers through the convict leasing system. Insights into modern day prisons reveal that the U.S. criminal justice system still retains many of the racist impulses of early American history. In her groundbreaking work, *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander equates the social status of African-American men to the pre-Civil Rights Jim Crow era. She writes, "mass incarceration in the United States had, in fact, emerged as a stunningly comprehensive and well-disguised system of racialized social control that functions in a manner strikingly similar to Jim Crow" (4). Similarly, Joy James draws parallels between the slavery plantation and the modern day prison. She writes in the 2005 anthology of imprisoned authors entitled *The New Abolitionists* that the "[prison] is the modern day manifestation of the plantation" (xxiii). James contends that as long as there exists a penal system that imprisons its citizens along racial lines, democracy operates merely in service of the master-slave narrative of the earlier slavery period. Not surprisingly, however, such claims as to the presence of "(neo)slavery" in contemporary America are still often met with disbelief and cynicism (James xxiii). Thus, the illusive nature of these social problems in incarceration practices makes the study of these memoirs doubly important.

As do the writers of this study, many men-of-color, black, Latino, and Indigenous men, have protested the overt racial discrimination in the criminal justice system through prison writings. In my study, the three prison writers, Cleaver, Baca, and Abu-Jamal, identify as and represent the experiences of their minority group in their narratives of imprisonment. In their works, the prison and criminal justice systems function as extensions of the historical enslavement and subjugation of racial minorities. To these men, the idea that the law is logical, objective, and fair is not only far from being true but also is a misconception that they work to uncover and relay in their writings. They show that the people who end up in prison are not crazed killers and hardened criminals but the disadvantaged who are subject to discrimination, trauma, disabilities, addictions, and mental illnesses. Even as the three writers struggle to come to terms with their crimes, they rebel against the accusations of their juridical guilt. Rather, they interrogate the complex role that the larger society plays in their conversions to crime and try to come to an understanding about their relationships to society. In other words, instead of dwelling on the matters guilt and innocence, they argue for the interconnectedness between the plight of the incarcerated and those on the outside.

As my study indicates, prison writings not only expose parts of our society that are increasingly becoming more censored, obscured, and closed off but also provide insights into the kind of social work required in advancing prison reform. Critical works that examine prison writings are even more necessary in current times with places like Guantanamo Bay, a U.S. military detention camp that is both geographically hidden from sight and kept secret from the public. In many ways, Guantanamo Bay is an example of what the space of prison represents. Situated on the southern part of the island of Cuba, when it opened in 2002, it was designed to be a space that is literally and symbolically outside the borders of the nation. The illegal

imprisonment without representation and due process and the inhumane torture of the detainees shocked the nation in 2004 when the facts of the camp were revealed in the court case *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld*. Although Guantanamo Bay is an extreme case, the violations against humanity and the secretive nature of the camp serve as a lesson on how invisible these spaces can become. Studying the writings from these spaces is one way that we can begin to transcend and dismantle the divide between prison and the rest of the society.

WORKS CITED

- Abbott, Jack Henry. *In the Belly of the Beast: Letters from Prison*. New York: Random House, 1981. Print.
- Abu-Jamal, Mumia. *Live from Death Row*. New York: Avon Books, 1996. Print.
- . *All Things Censored*. New York: Seven Stories P, 2000. Print.
- . *Faith of Our Fathers: An Examination of the Spiritual Life of African and African-American People*. Trenton: Africa World P, 2003. Print.
- . *We Want Freedom: A Life in the Black Panther Party*. Cambridge: South End P, 2004. Print.
- . *Marxism, Reparation, & the Black Struggle*. New York: World View Forum, 2007. Web.
- . *Jailhouse Lawyers: Prisoners Defending Prisoners V. the U.S.A.* San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2009. Print.
- . *The Classroom and the Cell: Conversations on Black Life in America*. 1st ed. Chicago: Third World P, 2012. Print.
- Acuña, Rodolfo. *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*. New York: Harper & Row, 1972. Print.
- Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: New P, 2012. Print.
- Amnesty International. *United States of America, a Life in the Balance: The Case of Mumia Abu-Jamal*. New York: Amnesty International P, 2000. Print.
- Anderson, Jervis. "Race, Rage, & Eldridge Cleaver." *Commentary* 46.6 (Dec. 1, 1968): 63. ProQuest. Web. 12 Feb. 2016.
- Anderson, S. *In Defense of Mumia*. New York: Writers and Readers Pub., 1996. Print.

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco, Aunt Lute Books, 1987. Print.
- Aucoin, James. *The Evolution of American Investigative Journalism*. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2005. Print.
- Baca, Jimmy Santiago. *A Glass of Water*. 1st ed. New York: Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2009. Print.
- . *A Place to Stand: The Making of a Poet*. 1st ed. New York: Grove Press, 2001. Print.
- . *Adolescents on the Edge: Stories and Lessons to Transform Learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2010. Print.
- . *Bound by Honor*. Dir. Taylor Hackford. Hollywood Pictures, 1993.
- . *C-train (Dream Boy's Story) and Thirteen Mexicans: Poems*. 1st ed. New York: Grove Press, 2002. Print.
- . *Healing Earthquakes: A Love Story in Poems*. 1st ed. New York: Grove Press, 2001. Print.
- . *Immigrants in Our Own Land & Selected Early Poems*. New York, N.Y.: New Directions Books, 1982. Print.
- . Interview with John Keene. "Poetry is What We Speak to Each Other." *Callaloo* 17 (1994): 33-51. Web.
- . *Los Tres Jihos de Julia*. Los Angeles Theatre Center, 1991.
- . *Martín ; &, Meditations on the South Valley*. New York: New Directions, 1987. Print.
- . *Set This Book on Fire!* 2nd ed. Mena, AR: Cedar Hill Publications, 2001. Print.
- . *Spring Poems Along the Rio Grande*. New York: New Directions Pub., 2007. Print.
- . *Swords of Darkness*. San Jose, Calif.: Mango Publications, 1981. Print.

- . *The Importance of a Piece of Paper*. 1st ed. New York: Grove Press, 2004. Print.
- . *What's Happening*. Willimantic, Conn.: Curbstone Press, 1982. Print.
- Baldus, David C. *Equal Justice and the Death Penalty*. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1989. Print
- Barrera, Mario. *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality*. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 1979. Print.
- Bernstein, Lee. *America Is the Prison: Arts and Politics in Prison in the 1970s*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2010. Print.
- Bird, S. Elizabeth. "Audience Demands in a Murderous Market: Tabloidization in U.S. Television News." *Tabloid Tales: Global Debates Over Media Standards*. Eds. Colin Sparks and John Tullock. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000. 213-28. Print.
- Bisson, Terry. *On a Move: The Story of Mumia Abu-Jamal*. Farmington: Litmus Books, 2000. Print.
- Bogle, Donald. *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*. 4th ed. New York: Continuum, 2001. Web.
- Botstein, Leon. "Damaged Literacies: Illiteracies and American Democracy." *Daedalus* 119 (1990): 55-84. Web.
- Boyd, Herb. "Live from Death Row." *The Black Scholar* 25:3 (1995), 49. ProQuest. Web.
- Braithwaite, John and Phillip Pettit. *Not Just Deserts: A Republican Theory of Criminal Justice*. England: Clarendon P, 1990. Print.
- Braly, Malcolm. *False Starts: A Memoir of San Quentin and Other Prisons*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1976. Print.
- Brandt, Deborah. *Literacy in American Lives*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Print.

"Brown v. Plata." "Brown v. Plata." *Oyez*. Chicago-Kent College of Law at Illinois Tech, n.d. Web. Feb 12, 2016. <https://www.oyez.org/cases/2010/09-1233>.

Bruno, Paula M. "'Ni Miedo De La Pinta, Ni Miedo De La Muerte': Jimmy Santiago Baca's Prison Poems." *Genre* 35 (2002): 575-98. Web.

Bulosan, Carlos. *America Is in the Heart, a Personal History*. Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1946. Print.

Buzz, Alexander. *Is William Martinez Not Our Brother?: Twenty Years of the Prison Creative Arts Project*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Library, 2010. Print.

Candelaria, Cordelia. *Chicano Poetry: A Critical Introduction*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986. Print.

Carter, "Hurricane" Rubin. *The Sixteenth Round: from Number 1 Contender to #45472*. New York: Viking P, 1974. Print.

Castor, Peter. *Prisons, Race, and Masculinity in Twentieth-century U.S. Literature and Film*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2008. Print.

Cheliotis, Leonidas and Jordanoska, Aleksandra. "The Arts of Desistance: Assessing the Role of Arts-based Programmes in Reducing Reoffending." *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*. Wiley Online Library. Web. 12 Feb. 2016.

Chevigny, Bell Gale. Ed. *Doing Time: 25 Years of Prison Writing*. New York: Arcade P, 2011. Print.

Cisneros, Josue David. *The Border Crossed Us: Rhetorics of Borders, Citizenship, and Latina/o Identity*. Tuscaloosa: The U of Alabama P, 2014. Print.

Cleaver, Eldridge. *Eldridge Cleaver: Post-prison Writings and Speeches*. New York: Random House, 1969. Print.

---. *Soul on Ice*. New York: Delta Trade Paperbacks, 1999. Print.

---. *Target Zero: A Life in Writing*. 1st ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. Print.

- Cleaver, Kathleen. Introduction. *Target Zero: A Life in Writing*. 1st ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, (2006) xi-xxvi. Print.
- Committee on CCCC Language Statement. "Students' Right to Their Own Language." *College Composition and Communication* 25 (1974): 1-18. Print.
- Cullen, Francis T. and Karen E. Gilbert. *Reaffirming Rehabilitation*. Cincinnati: Anderson Pub. Co., 1982. Print.
- Cummins, Eric. *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994. Print.
- Darnton, Robert. "Writing News and Telling Stories." *Daedalus* 104: 175-94. Web.
- Davis, Angela Y. *Angela Davis—an Autobiography*. New York: International Publishers, 1988. Print.
- . *Are Prisons Obsolete?* New York: Seven Stories P, 2003. Print.
- . *Women, Race & Class*. New York: Vintage Books, 1983. Print.
- Davis, Simone Weil. "Inside-Out: The Reaches and Limits of a Prison Program." *Razor Wire Women: Prisoners, Activists, Scholars, and Artists*. Eds. Jodie Michelle Lawston and Ashley E. Lucas. Albany: State U of New York P, 2011. 203-224. Print.
- DeChaine, D. Robert. Ed. *Border Rhetorics: Citizenship and Identity on the US-Mexico Frontier*. Tuscaloosa: The U of Alabama P, 2012. Print.
- Douglass, Frederick. "Why is the Negro Lynched?" *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*. Ed. Philip S. Foner. 1st ed. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books (1999) 750-76. Web.
- Du Bois, W. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Oxford UP, 2007. Web.
- Ellis, Aimé J. *If We Must Die: from Bigger Thomas to Biggie Smalls*. Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 2011. Print.

- Ettema, James S and Theodore L. Glasser. *Custodians of Conscience: Investigative Journalism and Public Virtue*. New York: Columbia University P, 1998. Print.
- Farley, Anthony Paul. "Sadomasochism and the Colorline: Reflections on the Million Man March." *Black Men on Race, Gender, and Sexuality: a Critical Reader*. Ed. Devon W. Carbado. New York: New York UP, (1999) 68-84. Web.
- Faulkner, Maureen and Michael A. Smerconish. *Murdered by Mumia: A Life Sentence of Loss, Pain, and Injustice*. Guilford: The Lyons P, 2008. Print.
- Fine, Gary Alan and Ryan D. White. "Creating Collective Attention in the Public Domain: Human Interest Narratives and the Rescue of Floyd Collins." *Social Forces*. 81:1 (2002), 57-85. Jstor. Web. 19 Mar. 2016
- Franklin, Bruce, H. *Prison Literature in America: The Victim as Criminal and Artist*. Westport: L. Hill, 1978. Print.
- . *American Prisoners and Ex-Prisoners: Their Writings*. Westport, Lawrence Hill & Company, 1982. Print.
- "Furman v. Georgia." *Oyez*. Chicago-Kent College of Law at Illinois Tech, n.d. Oct 15, 2015. <<https://www.oyez.org/cases/1971/69-5030>>
- Gates Jr., Henry Louis. Foreword. *Target Zero: A Life in Writing*. 1st ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, (2006) vii-ix. Print.
- Gee, James Paul. *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses*. 2nd ed. London: Taylor & Francis, 1996. Print.
- Gomez-Quinones, Juan. *Chicano Politics: Reality and Promise, 1940-1990*. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1990. Print.
- Graff, Harvey J. "Literacy, Myths, and Legacies: Lessons from the History of Literacy." *Literacy and Historical Development: A Reader*. Ed. Harvey J. Graff. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2007.12-37. Print.
- Guerra, Juan C. *Close to Home: Oral and Literate Practices in a Transnational Mexican Community*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1998. Print.

- Harper, Phillip Brian. *Are We Not Men?: Masculine Anxiety and the Problem of African-American Identity*. New York: Oxford UP, 1996. Print.
- Harris, Jean. *Marking Time: Letters from Jean Harris to Shana Alexander*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991. Print.
- Harris, Trudier. *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana UP, 1984. Print.
- Hinshaw, Wendy W. and Kathie Klarreich. "Writing Exchanges: Composing across Prison and University Classrooms." *Women, Writing, and Prison: Activists, Scholars, and Writers Speak Out*. Eds. Tobi Jacobi and Ann Folwell Stanford. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014: 137-52. Print.
- Holling, Michelle A. "A Dispensational Rhetoric in 'The Mexican Question in the Southwest.'" *Border Rhetorics: Citizenship and Identity on the US-Mexico Frontier*. Ed. D. Robert DeChaine. Tuscaloosa: The U of Alabama P, 2012. 65-85. Print.
- Howard-Pitney, David. *The African American Jeremiad: Appeals for Justice in America*. Rev. and expanded ed. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2005. Print.
- . "The Enduring Black Jeremiad: The American Jeremiad and Black Protest Rhetoric, from Frederick Douglass to W.E. B. Du Bois, 1841-1919." *American Quarterly* 38:3 (1986): 481-492. Jstor. Web. 26 Feb. 2016.
- Hughes, Helen MacGill. *News and the Human Interest Story*. Greenwood P, 1968. Print.
- Hughes, Jenny. *Doing the Arts Justice: A Review of Research Literature, Practice, and Theory*. London: Department for Culture, Media, and Sport. 2005. Web. 12 Feb. 2016.
http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication_archive/doing-the-arts-justice-a-review-of-research-literature-practice-and-theory/.
- Ivanic, Roz. *Writing and Identity: The Discoursal Construction of Identity in Academic Writing*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1998. Print.
- Jackson, George. *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1994. Print.

Jackson II, Ronald L. *Scripting the Black Masculine Body: Identity, Discourse, and Racial Politics in Popular Media*. Albany: State U of New York P, 2005. Web.

Jacobi, Cobi. *Contraband Literacies: Incarcerated Women and Writing-as-Activism*. Diss. Syracuse U, 2003. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2003. Web.

---. "Afterword: Speaking Out for Social Justice: Institutional Challenges and Uncertain Solidarities." *Women, Writing, and Prison: Activists, Scholars, and Writers Speak Out*. Eds. Tobi Jacobi and Ann Folwell Stanford. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014. 241-52. Print.

James, Joy. *The New Abolitionists: (Neo) Slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings*. Albany: State of U of New York P, 2005. Print.

Jensen, Richard J. and John C. Hammerback. "From Muslim to Mormon: Eldridge Cleaver's Rhetorical Crusade." *Communication Quarterly* 34:1 (1986) 24-40. Taylor and Francis Online. Web. 26 Feb. 2016.

Keene, John. "Poetry is What We Speak to Each Other: An Interview with Jimmy Santiago Baca." *Callaloo* 17: 1 (1994): 33-51. Jstor. Web. 9 Mar. 2016.

Kerman, Piper. *Orange is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2011. Print.

King Jr., Martin Luther. *I Have a Dream*. New York: HarperCollins, 1963. Print.

King, Ryan S, Marc Mauer, and Malcolm C. Young. *Incarceration and Crime: A Complex Relationship*. Washington D.C.: The Sentencing Project, 2005. Web. 12 Feb. 2016. http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/inc_iandc_complex.pdf.

Kingston, Maxine Hong. *The Woman Warrior : Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*. Vintage International ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1989. Print.

Kolbert, Elizabeth. "Public Radio Won't Use Commentary by Inmate." *New York Times*. 17 May 1994. Web.

Lindorff, Dave (David). *Killing Time: An Investigation into the Death Row Case of Mumia Abu-Jamal*. Monroe: Common Courage P, 2003. Print.

Lucas, Ashley. "When I Run in My Bare Feet: Music, Writing, and Theater in a North Carolina Women's Prison." *American Music*. 31:2 (2013): 134-62. Project Muse. Web. 12 Feb. 2016.

MacDougall, Curtis Daniel. *Interpretative Reporting*. 8th ed. New York: Collier Macmillan, 1982. Print.

Maines, David R. *The Faultline of Consciousness: a View of Interactionism in Sociology*. New York: A. de Gruyter, 2001. Print.

Marin, Marguerite V. *Social Protest in an Urban Barrio: A Study of the Chicano Movement, 1966-1974*. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1991. Print.

Marx, Karl. *Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire: (post)modern Interpretations*. Sterling: Pluto P, 2002. Print.

McCleskey v. Kemp." *Oyez*. Chicago-Kent College of Law at Illinois Tech, n.d. Oct 15, 2015. <<https://www.oyez.org/cases/1986/84-6811>>

Michelson, Seth. "Count-Time: Neoliberalism, Subjectivity, and Jimmy Santiago Baca's Prisoner Poetry." *Pacific Coast Philology* 48 (2013): 25-47. Web.

Miraldi, Robert. *Muckraking and Objectivity: Journalism's Colliding Traditions*. New York: Greenwood P, 1990. Print.

Moses, Wilson Jeremiah. *Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms: Social and Literary Manipulations of a Religious Myth*. Rev. ed. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State UP, 1993. Print.

National Education Association. *The Invisible Minority: Report of the NEA-Tucson Survey on the Teaching of Spanish to the Spanish-Speaking*. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1966. Web.

Neate, Wilson. *Tolerating Ambiguity: Ethnicity and Community in Chicano/a Writing*. New York: Peter Lang, 1998. Print.

O'Connor, Patrick, J. *The Framing of Mumia Abu-Jamal*. 1st ed. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2008. Print.

- Olguin, B.V. *La Pinta: Chicana/o Prisoner Literature, Culture, and Politics*. Austin: U of Texas P, 2010. Print.
- Ongiri, Amy Abugo. "'We are Family': Black Nationalism, Black Masculinity, and the Black Gay Cultural Imagination." *College Literature* 24:1 (1997) 280-294. Print.
- Ono, Kent A. and John Sloop. *Shifting Borders: Rhetoric, Immigration, and California's Proposition 187*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2002. Print.
- Peltier, Leonard. *Prison Writings: My Life is My Sun Dance*. New York: St. Martin's P, 1999. Print.
- Pérez-Torres, Rafael. *Movements in Chicano Poetry: Against Myths, Against Margins*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995. Print.
- Pew's Center on the States. *One in 100 Behind Bars in America 2008*. Philadelphia: The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2008. Web. 12 Feb. 2016.
http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/reports/sentencing_and_corrections/onein100pdf.pdf.
- Pinar, Willilam F. *The Gender of Racial Politics and Violence in America: Lynching, Prison Rape, & the Crisis of Masculinity*. New York: P. Lang, 2001. Print.
- Protest, David. *The Journalism of Outrage: Investigative Reporting and Agenda Building in America*. New York: Guilford Press, 1991. Print.
- Reid-Pharr, Robert F. "'Tearing the Goat's Flesh': Homosexuality, Abjection, and the Production of a Late Twentieth Century Black Masculinity." *Studies in the Novel* 28:3 (1996) 372-94. Print.
- Reynolds, Sadie. "Good Intentions Aside: The Ethics of Reciprocity in a University-Jail Women's Writing Workshop Collaboration." *Women, Writing, and Prison: Activists, Scholars, and Writers Speak Out*. Eds. Tobi Jacobi and Ann Folwell Stanford. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014. 95-117. Print.
- Richardson, Riché. *Black Masculinity and the U.S. South: from Uncle Tom to Gangsta*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2007. Print.

- Rimer, Sara. "Death Sentence Overturned in 1981 Killing of Officer." *New York Times*. 19 Dec. 2001. Web.
- Rodriguez, Richard. *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez: an Autobiography*. Boston, Mass.: D.R. Godine, 1982. Print.
- Ross, Luana. *Inventing the Savage: The Social Construction of Native American Criminality*. Austin: University of Texas P, 1998. Print.
- Rout, Kathleen. *Eldridge Cleaver*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991. Print.
- Royster, Jacqueline Jones. Introduction. *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900*. By Ida B. Wells-Barnett. Boston: Bedford Books, 1997. Print.
- Sabol, William J., Todd D. Minton, and Paige M. Harrison. *Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2006*. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007. 12 Feb. 2016.
<http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/pjim06.pdf>.
- San Miguel Jr., Guadalupe. *"Let All of Them Take Heed": Mexican Americans and the Campaign for Educational Equality in Texas, 1910-1981*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1987. Print.
- Schanche, A. Don. "Burn the Mother Down." *Saturday Evening Post*. 16 Nov. 1968: 30. Print.
- Scheer, Robert. Introduction. *Eldridge Cleaver: Post-prison Writings and Speeches*. New York: Random House, (1969) vii-xxxiii. Print.
- Schlanger, Margo. "Plata v. Brown and Realignment: Jails, Prisons, Courts, and Politics." *Harvard Civil Rights—Civil Liberties Law Review* 48.1 (2013): 165-215. Pro Quest. Web. 12 Feb. 2016.
- Sedano, Michael Victor. "Chicanismo: A Rhetorical Analysis of Themes and Image of Selected Poetry from the Chicano Movement." *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 44 (1980): 177-90. Taylor and Francis Online. Web. 9 Mar. 2016.

- Selzer, Jack. "Rhetorical Analysis: Understanding How Texts Persuade Readers." *What Writing Does and How It Does It: An Introduction to Analyzing Textual Practices*. Eds. Charles Bazerman and Paul Prior. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004. 279-307. Print.
- Shakur, Assata. *Assata: An Autobiography*. Chicago, L. Hill Books, 2001. Print.
- "Simon & Schuster, Inc. v. Members of New York State Crime Victims Board." *Oyez*. Chicago-Kent College of Law at Illinois Tech, n.d. Oct 15, 2015.
<https://www.oyez.org/cases/1991/90-1059>
- Singer, Richard G. *Just Deserts: Sentencing Based on Equality & Desert*. Cambridge: Ballinger Pub. Co., 1979. Print.
- Sloop, John M. *The Cultural Prison: Discourse, Prisoners, and Punishment*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1996. Print.
- Smitherman, Geneva. *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977. Print.
- Standford, Ann Folwell. "Introduction: Not Much Silence Here." *Women, Writing, and Prison: Activists, Scholars, and Writers Speak out*. Eds. Tobi Jacobi and Ann Folwell Stanford. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014. 1-18. Print.
- Street, Brian. "New Literacy Studies and the Continua of Biliteracy." *Educational Linguistics in Practice: Applying the Local Globally and the Global Locally*. Eds. Francis M. Hult and Kendall A. King. Buffalo: Multilingual Matters, 2011. 59-67.
- Stuckey, J. *The Violence of Literacy*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1991. Print.
- Tolnay, S.E. and E.M. Beck. *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings. 1882-1930*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1995. Print.
- Villanueva, Victor. "Maybe a Colony: And Still Another Critique of the Comp Community." *The Norton Book of Composition Studies*. Ed. Susan Miller. New York: Norton, 2009. Print.
- . *Bootstraps: from an American Academic of Color*. Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1993. Print.

- Walker, David. *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State UP, 2000. Print.
- Wallace, Michele. *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*. Verso classics ed. London; New York: Verso, 1999. Print.
- Washington, Booker T. "Atlanta Exposition Address." *Will of a People: A Critical Anthology of Great African American Speeches*. Ed. Richard W. Leeman. Illinois: Southern Illinois UP, (2012) 184-7. Print.
- Weinglass, Leonard. *Race for Justice: Mumia Abu-Jamal's Fight Against the Death Penalty*. Monroe: Common Courage P, 1995. Print.
- Wells-Barnett, Ida B. *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900*. Boston: Bedford Books, 1997. Print.
- White, Walter Francis. *Rope & Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch*. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 2001. Print.
- Wideman, Edgar John. Introduction. *Live from Death Row*. New York: Avon Books, (1996) xxiii-xxxiv. Print.
- Williams, Daniel R. *Executing Justice: An Inside Account of the Case of Mumia Abu-Jamal*. 1st ed. New York: St. Martin's P, 2001. Print.
- Williams, Patricia. "The Executioner's Automat." *Nation*. 261: 2 (1995) 59-64. Print.
- Wright, Richard. *Native Son*. First Olive ed. New York: Olive Editions/HarperCollins Publishers, 2014. Print.
- X, Malcolm. *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990. Print.
- . *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1999. Print.
- Ybarra-Frausto, Tomás. "The Chicano Movement and the Emergence of a Chicano Poetics Consciousness." *In New Directions in Chicano Scholarship*, ed. Ricardo Romo and

Raymund Paredes, pp 81-110. La Jolla: University of California at San Diego, Chicano Studies. Print.

Young, Morris. *Minor Re/Visions: Asian American Literacy Narratives as a Rhetoric of Citizenship*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004. Print.