DIGITAL ACCESS TO SCHOLARSHIP AT HARVARD
DASH.HARVARD.EDU

HARVARD LIBRARY
Office for Scholarly Communication

Abolition as Spiritual Discipline

Citation
Creeks, Azani Amarachi. 2022. Abolition as Spiritual Discipline. Master's thesis, Harvard Divinity School.

Permanent link
https://nrs.harvard.edu/URN-3:HUL.INSTREPOS:37373007

Terms of Use
This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA

Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.
Please share how this access benefits you. Submit a story .

Accessibility

Abolition as Spiritual Discipline

By Azani Amarachi Creeks
Advisors: Jacob Olupona, PhD and Mac Loftin

A Senior Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Theological Studies
Harvard Divinity School
May 2022

3

I smell the questioning flashlights,
walking down the hall, closing the storage doors
on dead lives,

demanding I recite the patented number, stamped on
my ass,
which is presently subletting the space
my soul used to own.
I'm also asked where I got my map of the justice system.
I say the judge traded it for my birth certificate.
The interrogator smiles, saying he'd never trade his,
and that I'm getting prettier with age.
Not mentioning ugly with time.

4

The dark highlights my barren existence,
that's gushed from me so far.
And I wonder, how there's even a corpuscule of patience
left.
The closing door joins the lock in the key
of finality, in three years from today time.

Carolyn Baxter, excerpts from "On Being Counted"[1]

---

[1] Baxter, Carolyn. 1979. *Prison Solitary, and Other Free Government Services*. Vol. 41. Greenfield Center, N.Y: Greenfield Review Press. pp. 33-34

Abolition as Spiritual Discipline

I. Introduction

The Abolition Collective recognizes "the abolitionist struggle as the struggle against patriarchy, capitalism, heteronormativity, ableism, colonialism, the state, and white supremacy," while it is also the struggle for "making other worlds through the painstaking creation of collective frameworks for justice, freedom, self-determination, and interdependence."[2] My daily abolitionist practice is both a struggle against and a struggle for, a demolition and reconstruction of the mind, body, and spirit. When we frame abolition as a spiritual discipline, we can see the value in turning our political commitment into a ritual, daily practice that becomes an ethic.

Though abolition is found wherever there is injustice, I primarily draw from sources related to prison abolition. Using the writings of incarcerated abolitionists as my guide, I consider answers to the following questions: What might it mean for us to read writings from incarcerated abolitionists as coming together to create a sacred text? What if we used their words to guide us, to shape our worldview, our understanding of self and other? What if we understood the prison as sacred – not because the United States has deemed the punitive prison critical to its existence, although that is true – sacred because of the concentration of will and wisdom located there? Sacred because those who are incarcerated can teach us the most about how to usher in a new world?

And then, what would it look like for us to take those lessons and apply them to our everyday lives? To see beyond the carceral spaces widely understood as such, and identify where we have allowed carcerality to flood the crevices of our lives in such a way that it flushed out the humanity of our society and left it to die in the prison? Where and how have we invited carceral

[2] Abolition Collective. 2020. *Making Abolitionist Worlds*. La Vergne: Common Notions. pg. 2-3

logic and practice into the school, the home, the street, the body? How might we move our individual and collective spirits away from carcerality and toward freedom?

I suggest that the practice of abolition as a spiritual discipline can help us think through these questions and overcome the existing, dominant spiritual commitment to the oppressive religio-racial capitalism that founded the modern prison. As a religious studies scholar, I spend much of my time emphasizing that the role of spiritual commitments (which often manifest as religion) cannot be overlooked in our attempts to understand, navigate, and change our realities. It is my hope that matters of the spirit will be taken seriously in our struggle for freedom. As bell hooks wrote, "spiritual life is first and foremost about commitment to a way of thinking and behaving that honors principles of inter-being and interconnectedness".[3]

Most people are not born or raised as prison abolitionists. Many of us internalize dominant rhetoric about what crime is, where it takes place, who criminals are, and what they deserve, which is often prison, death, or the equivalent of what was done to them. Most people will never see the inside of a prison, and may have no clue where the jail or prison is where they live. All of this is by design – we are taught that prisons are a bad, scary place we never want to go (this is true) and this is supposed to deter us from committing crime (we know that this has not been effective[4]). Those convicted and yet to be convicted of crimes are whisked away from their communities and we are supposed to forget about them; and when we do happen to think of them, we are supposed to think of the bad, scary place that they deserve to be in due to their own choices.

So how does anyone become a prison abolitionist? How are we called into an abolitionist discipline? First and foremost, abolitionists are made in prisons. Those who experience

---

[3] hooks, bell. 2000. *All About Love: New Visions*. 1st ed. New York: William Morrow. pp. 109
[4] National Institute of Justice. 2016. "Five Things About Deterrence," U.S. Department of Justice, https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/247350.pdf

incarceration have always been the ones leading the charge against the prison, as this paper explores. Through their resistance inside and communication with those outside, the call to discipline and action has spread beyond the walls of the institution to prisoners' families and loved ones and rippled through entire communities. Those who do not know someone who lives or works in the prison may hear the abolitionist call in other ways: social and popular media, local events, fundraisers, or even in the classroom – I first learned about prison abolition when I was assigned *Are Prisons Obsolete?* in a sociology course during my freshman year of college.

It is not the case that every person that learns about the cruelty of prisons and carcerality becomes an abolitionist. In fact, the state rarely tries to deny the cruelty of the prison precisely because the prison is supposed to threaten us and represent the worst of society. Many people laud reforms like better food, access to education, and alternatives to detention such as electronic monitoring (the prison goes where you go). Unfortunately, reforms only serve to reinforce the legitimacy and expand the territory of the carceral system. Those who respond to the abolitionist call are unsatisfied by reforms and recognize the ways that prisons continue cycles of violence through criminalizing survival, isolating people from communities, and emphasizing punishment over accountability. Responding to the abolitionist call and adopting an abolition discipline begins with listening to incarcerated people, which is what this paper aims to do.

Scholars who write about prisons and abolition often carry out a systems-level analysis – with good reason. Jessica Mitford, Michel Foucault, Angela Davis, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Rodriguez, and other seminal scholars on prisons and their demise trace how shapeshifting systems of domination throughout US history brought us to this moment. While this thesis is greatly indebted to the work of such scholars, I hope to turn our attention to the level of the

individual – not separate from, but nested within and constitutive of communities and systems. Black Panther Safiya Bukhari, who spent nearly eight years in prison, wrote:

> "We must exorcise those characteristics of ourselves and traits of the oppressor nation in order to carry out that most important revolution — the internal revolution. This is the revolution that creates a new being capable of taking us to freedom and liberation. As we are creating this new being, we must simultaneously be struggling to defeat racism, capitalism, and imperialism — and liberate the Black Nation."[5]

Bukhari's call for internal revolution parallels the two goals of abolition: exorcizing harmful -isms and creating a new being. Abolition absolutely works toward these goals at the systems level, but abolitionists also understand that individuals will be remade through this process. To examine how this happens, I turn to archives of prison writing spanning nearly two hundred years.

There has certainly been interest in prison writing from individuals around the world, especially of men with a high profile outside the prison. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, a renowned Kenyan author imprisoned for writing in his native language rather than in the colonial English, wrote his first novel in Gĩkũyũ on toilet paper while incarcerated.[6] After struggling to get access to pen and paper, Irish author Oscar Wilde wrote *De Profundis* from his prison cell, contrasting the immorality of the sodomy laws he was punished under with Christ's morality, which had little to do with the law.[7] In a coordinated strategy, Martin Luther King Jr. remained in the Birmingham jail despite having enough money for bail, bringing attention to state violence in Birmingham and producing what many recognize as ''the most important written document of the civil rights

---

[5] Bukhari, Safiya. 2009. *The War before :the True Life Story of Becoming a Black Panther, Keeping the Faith in Prison, and Fighting for Those Left Behind*. New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York. pp. 61
[6] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. 2018. *Wrestling with the Devil : a Prison Memoir*. New York: The New Press. pp. 38
[7] Wilde, Oscar, and Vyvyan Beresford Holland. 1950. *De Profundis, : Being the First Complete and Accurate Version of 'Epistola: In Carcere et Vinculis*. [2d ed.]. London: Methuen.

era."[8] Malcolm Little converted to Islam and became Malcolm X in a Massachusetts state prison; letters from his years in prison reveal him signing off using the new moniker in 1950.[9] Incarcerated people have always documented their experience through writing and storytelling, and in recent decades, scholars have turned to anthologizing their words. Few analyses focus on prison writing influences abolition, and even fewer highlight the spiritual dimensions that connect incarcerated individuals to a larger movement.

Incarcerated people produce powerful works and transformations in prisons not because the prison stimulates their creative abilities–it in fact tries to stifle them–but despite the prison. This is what makes the prison a sacred site; that despite the violence, the degradation, the isolation, the death traps, everyday spirits are not only able to survive, but to create, to build community, to set themselves and one another free through moments and movements of interconnectedness. Despite condemnation by the prison, the abolitionist spirit claims and manifests its own freedom.

---

[8] Bass, S. Jonathan, Martin Luther King, and Project Muse. 2021. *Blessed Are the Peacemakers : Martin Luther King Jr., Eight White Religious Leaders, and the "Letter from Birmingham Jail"* Baton Rouge, Louisiana]: Louisiana State University Press. pp. 145

[9] Marable, Manning. 2011. *Malcolm X: a Life of Reinvention*. New York: Viking. pp. 96

II. Abolition as Tradition and Discipline

As the movement for police and prison abolition becomes more widely-known, we can consider the origins and legacy from which it descends. Abolition has its roots in the antislavery movements across the West – the first abolitionists were enslaved Native and African people who resisted capture, forced labor, and death in the colonization of the Americas and the transatlantic slave trade. These enslaved abolitionists participated in everyday resistance through things like working slowly, stealing from slave owners, and hosting gatherings, and they resisted on a larger scale – organizing revolts, killing slave owners, escaping (and helping others escape). Free people of all races became accomplices of the enslaved and joined them in demanding an end to the transatlantic slave trade, which ended in the United States through legislation in 1808, though the domestic slave trade continued. The fight for abolition spilled into the Civil War, and abolitionists claimed victory when the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect in 1863. For some abolitionists, this was *the* victory; the official end of slavery. For others, this was just *a* victory; what did it mean to be free without social and economic capital, without full rights?

As the nation-state has imagined new ways to maintain a predominantly-Black underclass through systems like sharecropping, policing, Jim Crow, the War on Drugs, and mass incarceration, abolition has expanded to include resistance to all such systems. Furthermore, the development of global systems of domination has led to an internationalist analysis within abolition movements. Though some may have disagreed in 1863, the legal end to slavery was just the beginning of abolition as we know it, which is itself unable to be contained by time. In abolition, time is not understood through linear progress, but through cycles and layers; any beginning is a middle and an end all at once. As Sarah Haley writes:

> "Abolition's temporality is the present continuous— the tense of a project that is ongoing and incomplete. It is also the subjunctive—the expression of what might be, what could have been, desire. As a concept, abolition addresses the vexing entanglements of past, present, and future; it insists on necessary transformations yet to be actualized."[10]

The ongoing and incomplete project of abolition is highly contextual, which is why I have narrowed the scope of this paper to prison abolition in the United States, with an even narrower case study of New York State. The spiritual discipline of American civil religion (state discipline) concerns itself primarily with its own preservation, which it understands as threatened or vulnerable to attack. Kelly Brown Douglas argues that the culture produced by American civil religion "turns people in on themselves as it sets people against one another… promotes the notion that one life has more value than another life… thrives on antagonistic relationships… does not value dialogue, mutuality, respect, or compassion" and is "a culture of death".[11] State discipline condemns those it deems expendable to civil, social, spiritual, and physical death. One way that American civil religion determines who is expendable is through racism, which Ruth Wilson Gilmore defines as "the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death."[12] The prison serves as *the* site for premature death, and certainly reflects Gilmore's understanding of racism as Black, brown, and Indigenous people are grossly overrepresented in prisons.

The spiritual discipline of abolition has always existed in opposition to and struggle against the spiritual discipline of American civil religion. In writing about the interactions between the Nation of Islam and the carceral state, Garrett Felber identifies a dialectics of discipline, which manifests as the "relationship between disciplined, collective Black protest and

---

[10] Haley, Sarah. 2020. "Abolition." In *Keywords for African American Studies*, 8:9–14. New York, USA: New York University Press. pp. 12 https://doi.org/10.18574/9781479810253-002.

[11] Douglas, Kelly Brown. 2015. *Stand Your Ground : Black Bodies and the Justice of God*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books. pp. 194-195

[12] Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. 2007. *Golden Gulag :prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. Berkeley: University of California Press. pp. 28

escalating punitive state discipline."[13] Though his analysis is not centered on the spiritual dimensions of discipline, it still offers a valuable lens for this work. Felber writes, "discipline here has a dual meaning: as a means of social control and coerciveness by the state, and as the individual and collective behavior necessary to resist and defeat it."[14] Many physical places have been designated as sites of state discipline that then also produced sites of abolitionist discipline: reservations, plantations, internment camps, prisons.

As American civil religion evolved, so too did abolition. The two disciplines entered an ongoing dialectic that leads to each responding to and contouring the other. Discipline should not be understood as inherently tied to punishment or correction; instead, discipline is the process by which our minds, bodies, and spirits make our values manifest. Discipline is our ethics in practice. The state operates from a capitalist ethic, one that is concerned primarily with hierarchy and status structured by racialized class. In contrast, abolition embraces an ethic of an interdependence that allows for true freedom.

Abolition constitutes a radical and prophetic tradition, ever evolving and stretching toward freedom. The pursuit of freedom is a spiritual endeavor; I take spiritual to mean *of the spirit*, that elusive dimension of self and society that we feel deeply but evades being contained by our attempts to describe and define it. I follow the definition of freedom (in contrast to emancipation) given by Joy James in the introduction of *The New Abolitionists*:

> "Emancipation is *given* by the dominant, it being a legal, contractual, and social agreement. Freedom is *taken* and created. It exists as a right against the captor and/or enslavor and a practice shared in community by the subordinate captives… Freedom is an ontological status – only the individual or collective – and perhaps a god – can create freedom."[15]

[13] Felber, Garrett. 2020. *Those Who Know Don't Say*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. pp. 2
[14] Felber, pp. 2
[15] James, Joy. 2005. *The New Abolitionists: (neo) Slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press. pp. xxii-xxiii

Abolition is freedom work. The Abolition Collective, a network of scholars, activists, writers, and community members dedicated to dismantling the prison-industrial complex and other structures of dominance, understand abolition as "a perpetual horizon… horizons guide and direct our work, but as they perpetually recede ahead of us, they also refuse to let us become complacent with half-measures, finished solutions, or reformist reforms."[16] Emancipation is at best a half-measure and at worst purely symbolic.

Freedom, on the other hand, comes through an embodiment of abolition, which seeks a total cultural and political reconstitution of society. Incarcerated abolitionists think, write, and organize beyond emancipation, beyond the commutation of their own sentences; they surely want to bring the prison walls down, but are also concerned with what might take its place. Taking care to not recreate the same oppressive systems with a new face, incarcerated abolitionists and their accomplices on the outside struggle together, in community and in hope, to bring about a new world. They commit to this vision by writing about it and rehearsing it in their own lives, modeling for us what could be possible for all, in this lifetime. Abolition as tradition is not escape, is not searching for utopia, is not false consciousness; but "abolition is about presence."[17]

Though abolition has always found support and strength from people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, I analyze and understand abolition through Black lineages tracing back to the transatlantic slave trade: the Black radical tradition and the Black prophetic tradition. As defined by Cedric Robinson in *Black Marxism*, the Black radical tradition represents "the continuing development of a collective consciousness informed by the historical struggles for

---

[16] Abolition Collective, pp. 4

[17] Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. 2020. *The Case for Prison Abolition: Ruth Wilson Gilmore on COVID-19, Racial Capitalism & Decarceration*. Democracy Now. The Case for Prison Abolition: Ruth Wilson Gilmore on COVID-19, Racial Capitalism & Decarceration. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1HWqYANmWLY.

liberation and motivated by the shared sense of obligation to preserve the collective being, the ontological totality."[18] A prophetic tradition "critiques the current social authorities in power, identifies the corruption in the world, and includes a call for action."[19] Abolition as tradition seeks to answer the following questions posed by Cornel West, perhaps the most prolific writer on the Black prophetic tradition:

> "How do you straighten your back up? How do you tell the truth? How do you bear witness? How do you organize? How do you mobilize? How do you generate forms of resistance and resilience in the face of some very, very ugly forms of terror and trauma and stigma?"[20]

The spiritual discipline of abolition attempts to answer *how* we might bring about freedom. I say that the pursuit of freedom is a spiritual endeavor because the perseverance required to *take* freedom demands a cultivation of spiritual fortitude. In letter after essay after poem, incarcerated writers declare that their spirit would not be broken. As the state claims victory over the bodies of those it deems criminal through incarceration, prisoners respond that the state *Can't Jail the Spirit* (title of an anthology of biographies of political prisoners first published in 1985).[21] A fortitude emerges from the discipline of the spirit that allows for perseverance despite stacked odds. After the Attica Rebellion of 1971, Angela Davis penned the following from New York's Women's House of Detention:

> "The revolt furnished irrefutable evidence of the colossal failure of the prison system in its totalitarian venture. The prisoners' spirits would not be defeated by physical repression and psychological abuse...a barren, atemporal, repressive world fostering

[18] Robinson, Cedric J. 2020. *Black Marxism*. Revised and updated third edition. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. pp. 171

[19] Clark, Emily. 2017. "Religion and Race in America Religion and Race in America." Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History. pp. 26

[20] West, Cornel. 2019. "The Socratic/Prophetic Traditions". Alternative Radio. https://www.alternativeradio.org/products/wesc008/

[21] *Can't Jail the Spirit: Political Prisoners in the U.S.: a Collection of Biographies*. 1989. Chicago, Ill.: Editorial El coquí

alienation had been transfigured into a closely-knit brotherhood founded on and steeped in resistance."[22]

William Mahony writes that within a tradition, spiritual discipline "establishes the orientation and outlines the procedures the seekers should follow in order to make real the transformation for which they hope."[23] The key words in Mahony's definition are *orientation, procedures, transformation*, and *hope.* Spiritual discipline aligns seekers with a particular orientation through intentional commitment to such orientation; in abolition, that orientation is toward freedom. Once seekers decide to align with or explore an orientation, they take up certain procedures (practices) of mind and body, driven by spirit, that help maintain seekers' commitment; these procedures (ex: solidarity, education) will be explored in greater detail in the following sections. Seekers follow these procedures until they "make real the transformation for which they hope"; the transformation sought in spiritual discipline of abolition is both personal and collective – it demands transformation of the self, transformation of interpersonal relationships, and transformation of society by orienting practitioners toward freedom. These three transformations happen concurrently and codependently, and rely on the belief that total transformation is possible (hope).

Throughout this paper, I emphasize the spiritual discipline of abolitionist tradition rather than exploring an abolitionist religion or theology. The field of theological studies has long explored the theological dimensions and impacts of social and political movements such as abolitionism. Plenty of scholarship exists on liberation theologies around the world and the role they play[ed] in mobilizing masses and demanding a divine and dignified justice. I follow Brandy Daniels' charge to consider theology in an abolitionist way:

---

[22] [Attica revolt], 1971. Papers of Angela Y. Davis, 1937-2017 (inclusive), 1968-2006 (bulk), MC 940, 56.1.. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute. pp. 3-4

[23] Mahony, William. "Spiritual Discipline." *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 13, 2005, pp. 8699–708.

> In order to harness and tap into its own moral, abolitionist imagination, theology must risk (paradoxically) and pursue (ideally) its own abolition—it must consider practices outside of its own theological and ecclesial frameworks as potential sources, and it must attend closely, critically, and continually to the ways that Christian practices, and accounts of them, perpetuate and produce harm.[24]

In explaining the topic for this paper to others, it was often asked or assumed that I would be writing about various historical or current theologies that are compatible with abolition (ex: liberation theology). Though such theologies have had incredible impact and can offer space for change, a truly abolitionist theology cannot work within the confines of an already existing structure – in the same way that abolition does not advocate for more just prisons, an abolitionist theology would not advocate for a more just Christianity. This is, in large part, why I choose not to focus on the idea of an abolitionist theology. As Daniels wrote, perhaps theology itself needs to be abolished, not reified through an abolitionist spin. While I leave larger questions around abolition and theology to other scholars and theologians, I focus on how discipline goes beyond the mind and body and conditions the spirit, which opens up abolition discipline to interfaith encounter and connection as it frees itself from the shackles of theology.

I do not suggest a spiritual discipline of abolition that is in any way totalizing or final. Disciplines are always changing, and an abolitionist vision requires us to accept that we do not and cannot have all the answers – that the answers reveal themselves through struggle with and care for one another. An abolitionist approach to theology, then, compels us to relinquish any sense of theological authority, and subject our beliefs, our selves, and our worlds to being made and remade.

---

[24] Daniels, Brandy. 2019. "Abolition Theology? Or, the Abolition of Theology? Towards a Negative Theology of Practice." *Religions (Basel, Switzerland)* 10 (3): 192. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10030192.

III. Case Study: The New York Prison System

In 1833, 10-year-old Austin Reed was convicted of arson and sentenced to ten years in the New York House of Refuge, the nation's first youth reformatory. Established by the Society for the Prevention of Pauperism and Crime led primarily by Quakers, the House of Refuge opened in 1825 and had committed more than 1,500 youth by the time Austin Reed arrived. While there, Reed was known as "a deep knowing impudent brazen faced boy,"[25] resisting authority within the reformatory.

Though Reed left the House of Refuge in 1839, he was soon sentenced to 20 years in Auburn Prison (constructed in 1816), which punished men with "perpetual solitary confinement, violent whippings with cat-o-nine-tails, a form of waterboarding called the 'shower bath,' being made to carry the 'yoke,' a 40-pound bar of iron chained to the back of the prisoner's neck and both hands." It was under these conditions that Reed wrote his memoir, the first published prison writing by a Black American. Reed was often condemned to solitary confinement for calling out the cruelty of the system and the officials that enforce it. Of the officials, he wrote,

> Those who might have done me a heap of good turned out to be destroyers and took away all of the good principles and reasons to which I was endowed with, and the high and noble mind which God had given me have all been destroyed by hard usage and a heavy club.[26]

In the United States, the South is often referred to as the most racist region of the country, an idea that emerged as a holdover from misperceptions that developed alongside the peculiar institution of chattel slavery and was codified with Lincoln's signature on the Emancipation Proclamation. The North, a certain history might tell us, was (and perhaps is) a safe haven for

---

[25] Williams, Thomas Chatterson. 2016. "'The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict,' by Austin Reed." *SFGate*, https://www.sfgate.com/books/article/The-Life-and-the-Adventures-of-a-Haunted-6843028.php

[26] Reed, Austin, and Caleb Smith. 2016. *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*. First edition. New York: Random House.

Black people, a place where equality was the law of the land. Though northern states were first to abolish slavery (1799 in New York), this can obsfuscate the fact that racism persists in plenty of other ways. A man incarcerated in one of the most notorious New York prisons said: "I was in Mississippi in the army, in Alabama in the army, and I was all over. I want to tell you something about Attica in 1960. I have never seen so much discrimination in one place in all my life."[27]

The modern prison (and resulting mass incarceration) is a peculiar institution of its own, one whose Northern origins built upon the racial hierarchies that undergirded chattel slavery and defined class hierarchies that were emerging as a result of industrialization. Like the plantation, the prison is a racial and economic project in the United States. The plantation, however, operated on overtly, legally racist terms, tying slave status to one's genealogy when phenotype would not suffice. On the other hand, the prison appeared to leave race out of its self-justification, leaning into a criminalization of poverty that would allow for an expanded pool for forced labor.

Because of chattel slavery and the historic economic disenfranchisement of Black people throughout the US, prisons reinforced racial hierarchies through a classed lens without using overtly racist language. To be clear, race continued to be criminalized alongside poverty; Black people are still grossly overrepresented in general populations, solitary confinement, and on death row. But the prison, unlike the plantation, did not limit itself to a racialized view of who could be forced into labor; the prison wanted something more.

Though New York state has a relatively low incarceration rate, ranked 42nd in the nation in 2018, its prisons have long been recognized for the brutality and repression the incarcerated population faces, and how the population fights back. Reed represents an earlier class of prison abolitionists, having been incarcerated before slavery was even abolished. New York would

[27] Felber, 52

continue to be a critical site for resistance to prisons, often enacted through significant organization and discipline.

As an adult, Reed was incarcerated at Auburn Prison (now Auburn Correctional Facility), which became the model for prisons around the nation. Developed in the 1820s, the Auburn system required prisoners to be silent as they worked alongside one another during the day and endured solitary confinement at night. Officials at Auburn enforced silence and mandated labor through the use of harsh punishments. The system worked as intended – Auburn was the first prison to profit from labor of those incarcerated by the state. The state discipline cultivated at Auburn, summarized by the slogan "industry, obedience, and silence," soon spread to other prisons around the country as it had proven to be profitable.[28] Wardens and officers imposed a discipline that would keep prisoners focused on work (industry) and yielding to authority without question (obedience). Perhaps the most oppressive of these three pillars is silence, which not only prevents whistleblowing or complaints about mistreatment, but also limits prisoners' ability to get to know one another. A culture of silence removes the possibility of building community, a prerequisite for solidarity in struggle and natural, healthy spiritual growth of an individual. Prisoners resisted state discipline with discipline of their own; labor strikes and protests occurred at Sing Sing in 1877, 1883, and 1913, and in Kings County Penitentiary in 1885.[29] Alongside resistance from the inside, those on the outside demanded an end to the prison system as it existed; following the 1913 strike at Sing Sing, Adolph Lewisohn published an article in the New

[28] "Prisons: History - The Auburn Plan." *Law Library - American Law and Legal Information*. https://law.jrank.org/pages/1776/Prisons-History-Auburn-plan.html
[29] Desta, Yoseph T. 2019. "Striking the Right Balance: Toward a Better Understanding of Prison Strikes." *Harvard Law Review* 132 (5): 1490–1519.

York Times with the headline “Abolish Sing Sing,” though the subtitle and opinion call for a new kind of prison, based not on confinement (which he deems unnecessary) but on labor.[30]

When the article was written, it may have really been possible to “abolish” Sing Sing and turn prisons away from the industry, obedience, silence model – at the turn of the 20th century, New York State operated less than ten prisons. Women were housed in the same facilities as men (at times in different wings or separate buildings, but on the same property) until 1887, when the House of Refuge for Women opened. Around the turn of the 20th century, women began to be transferred to reformatories now known as Albion, Bedford Hills, and Taconic Correctional Facilities, the only three currently existing women’s prisons in the state. Victoria Law highlights the tension in opening women’s facilities: “Although female prisons were seen as a much-needed reform over locking women in the cellars and attics of male penitentiaries, their existence led to an increase in the number of women sentenced to imprisonment.”[31] Disguised as a progressive reform that would make women safer, women’s prisons justified and created demand for women’s prisoners. As Mariame Kaba explains, prison reform always works like this: “The prison itself was born out of a reform movement and since its inception in the U.S. in the late 18th century, we have been tinkering towards imperfection. With every successive call for ‘reform,’ the prison has remained stubbornly brutal, violent, and inhumane.”[32]

Though the introduction of women’s prisons opened up space at some men’s facilities, early prisons still faced overcrowding. In 1931, construction began on Attica Prison, designed to reduce overcrowding and become a bigger, better Auburn. With the opening of Attica, the state

---

[30] Lewisohn, Adolph. 1913. “ABOLISH SING SING; And Build a Farm Industrial Prison in Its Stead.” *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/1913/11/27/archives/abolish-sing-sing-and-build-a-farm-industrial-prison-in-its-stead.html
[31] Law, Victoria. 2012. *Resistance Behind Bars: The Struggles of Incarcerated Women*. Oakland, CA: PM Press. pg. 167
[32] Kaba, Mariame. 2014. “Prison Reform’s In Vogue and Other Strange Things…” *Truthout*, https://truthout.org/articles/prison-reforms-in-vogue-and-other-strange-things/

could alleviate overcrowding and have enough space for the influx of people it would receive over the next 15 years. During World War II, more than 6,000 conscientious observers were sent to federal prison for refusal to participate in the war. Most of these men refused on the basis of their religious beliefs, representing communities including Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, and the Nation of Islam. Beyond their religious affiliations, many of the conscientious objectors had political commitments as well and were activists in a variety of movements for peace and justice.

From the late 1940s through the 1950s, more than 100 members of the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) were tried and convicted in the state of New York under the Smith Act, which criminalized anyone who is found to be:

> advocating, advising, or teaching the duty, necessity, desirability, or propriety of overthrowing or destroying any government in the United States by force or violence, or attempts to do so; or ... organizes or helps or attempts to organize any society, group, or assembly of persons who teach, advocate, or encourage the overthrow or destruction of any such government by force or violence; or becomes or is a member of, or affiliates with, any such society, group, or assembly of persons, knowing the purposes thereof.[33]

While those prosecuted under the Smith Act received a sentence of up to 5 years and a fine of up to $10,000, others in the CPUSA faced a harsher fate. Claudia Jones, an immigrant from Trinidad who had been living in New York for more than 25 years, was found guilty of violating both the Smith Act and the McCarran Act, which prohibited immigrants from being a member of the Communist Party. Jones' story reminds us that immigrant detention and deportation are also features of the carceral state – perhaps the most effective way to silence someone criticizing the state is to remove them altogether. Though Jones' leadership was crucial to the development of the CPUSA, especially as it relates to the party line on race and gender, Jones has been largely erased and overlooked. Pointing to the fact that Claudia Jones is literally

[33] Smith Act. 1940. https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/coretexts/_files/resources/texts/1940%20Smith%20Act.pdf

buried to the left of Karl Marx in London's Highgate Cemetery, biographer Carole Boyce Davies argues that Jones has nearly disappeared from popular memory of the CPUSA due to her deportation.[34] In 1957, activists and political prisoners achieved a legal victory in *Yates v. United States* in which the Supreme Court held that people could not be tried for having or repeating certain beliefs. This decision overturned several of the Smith Act convictions, though for many, like Claudia Jones, this victory would come too late.

As convictions from the McCarthy anti-communist era waned, political activity within prisons continued with those fighting against Jim Crow. One of the most prolific and impactful incarcerated writers of the 1950s and 1960s was Martin Sostre, son of Puerto Rican immigrants to New York. Originally convicted and sentenced to 12 years in prison in 1952, Sostre used his time in prison to learn everything he could about the law and became a jailhouse lawyer, winning cases for prisoner due process rights and protections against undue punishment. Sostre converted to Islam during his time in Attica, drawn to the Nation of Islam's call for Black nationalism. He joined three other men in submitting what is considered to be the first writ from Muslim prisoners, in which they petitioned for their right to their religious practices. As part of a national legal strategy within the NOI, Sostre would eventually create writ templates allowing for incarcerated people around the country to petition the government. Sostre also embraced the discipline of the NOI, adding it to his personal practices such as yoga, reading, and writing.

After his release from Attica in 1964, Sostre opened the Afro-Asian Bookshop in Buffalo. Having embraced the power of education to improve both spiritual and material conditions while in prison, Sostre committed his life to creating space for the exchange and dissemination of knowledge. The bookstore became somewhat of a community center, where

---

[34] Boyce Davies, Carole. 2008. *Left of Karl Marx: the Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*. Durham: Duke University Press.

youth could gather to listen to music, catch up with friends, and receive political education. Sostre saw his bookstore as a space for evangelization: "I would make several sales and create several new freedom fighters."[35] The power of the bookstore outside the prison walls reflected the safe haven provided by books and libraries inside; when incarcerated men took over the Queens House of Detention during the 1970 New York City jail rebellions, the library was the only space left untouched – a clear sign that the library (perhaps as a symbol for education more broadly) was a space to be cherished and protected. In 1967, just three years after his release, Sostre was charged with several felonies, later proven to be falsified by COINTELPRO. Friends and supporters immediately started the Martin Sostre Defense Committee in a show of solidarity, working to prove Sostre's innocence until his release in 1976 after being granted clemency by Governor Hugh Carey.

Conditions in prisons worsened after the end of de jure segregation – race continued to be criminalized in ways that contributed to an increasing prison population. On top of overcrowding, the state was not meeting the basic needs of incarcerated people, resulting in high rates of violence, illness, and death. After months of denied and ignored demands for improved living conditions in the overcrowded facility, prisoners took control of Attica from September 9 to 13, 1971, holding more than 40 officials hostage. With negotiations facilitated by the Attica Liberation Faction, a group that had submitted a list of demands to the governor and other officials in July of that year, incarcerated men reiterated their need for higher wages, increased access to medical care, healthier food, better educational programming, and freedom of political activities. Governor Nelson Rockefeller refused to meet with prisoners as requested, and instead ordered that the prison be retaken by force; resulting in 39 people killed by police, 4 more deaths attributed to the prisoners, and nearly one hundred people injured. More than 50 years later,

[35] Sostre, Martin. 1969. *Letters from Prison*. Buffalo: Martin Sostre Defense Committee. pp. 21

Attica is still the deadliest prison rebellion in US history. As the general public learned more about prison conditions through the rebellion and the shock of the state's violent response, public opinion supported the prisoners' demands. Feeling pressure from within and outside of the prison, state officials attempted to meet some demands, though any progress made would be eroded in the next decade.

Groups of incarcerated people continued to organize across New York State, inspired by the legacy of prison organizing that culminated in such increased visibility as a result of the Attica Rebellion. Three years after Attica, a far less-known rebellion occurred at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. More than 200 incarcerated women participated in the 1974 August Rebellion, successfully taking over the prison for several hours. The women organized the rebellion as a response to women being sent to solitary confinement without sufficient notice. After the rebellion, the women filed a class-action lawsuit *Powell v. Ward*, in which a judge ruled in the women's favor; victories of this ruling included increased protection for prisoners under the Fourth Amendment, replacement of prison administrators, and a settlement of over $100,000 that the women used for educational programming and legal support services.

In 1983, twelve years after the Attica Rebellion, men incarcerated in Sing Sing took over one of the prison blocks after months of making unmet demands. State officials responded with less violent negotiating tactics than had been used at Attica, and the rebellion came to an end with no casualties. Unfortunately, however, the state interpreted the men's demands as stemming from overcrowding, and thus committed to expanding the carceral system. The 1983 revolt occurred as incarceration rates skyrocketed, ten years after the creation of the Drug Enforcement Administration and one year before Reagan signed the Comprehensive Crime Control Act into law, increasing penalties for drug-related charges. Susan Rosenberg's claim that "the most

callous and cynical manipulations of sentence length are the main device the government employs in its war on drugs"[36] was already proven true by 1986; the prison population across the nation increased by 32 percent in the two years after the law went into effect.[37] The state made this possible by constructing 15 new prisons, doubling the number of facilities in New York. With so much new space, the population continued growing, peaking in 1999.

Since then, organizations such as Critical Resistance, Release Aging People in Prison (RAPP), and Project NIA have been working to reduce the number of people in New York carceral facilities. Dozens of prisons and jails have closed across the state in the past two decades, in large part due to continued resistance, organizing, and community-building that rejects the need for prisons and policing. In October 2019, the New York City Council approved an $8 billion plan to close the Rikers Island complex and open four smaller jails in its place by 2026. Rikers has come to be known for the poor conditions, abuse, and neglect experienced by those incarcerated there, of which more than 80 percent have yet to be convicted of a crime.

Unfortunately, the state has not reduced the population at Rikers through releasing people; they are simply transferred to other state facilities with more space. Though overcrowding is certainly an issue at Rikers and increased space may come as a relief to some, being transferred can present its own issues: distance from support networks, including lawyers and family members; adjustment to a new facility and community; increase in restrictions by moving from jail to prison; the same, different, or worse conditions than the previous facility. As one woman said of being transferred from Rikers to Bedford Hills (maximum security prison) in 2019 said: "They sold us a good story."[38]

---

[36] *The New Abolitionists*, 91
[37] Ostrow, Ronald. 1986. "1984 Crime Control Act Leads to 32% Rise in Prisoners". *Los Angeles Times*. https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1986-01-09-mn-14186-story.html
[38] Geneva, Tana. "Women Sent from Rikers to Maximum-Security Prison: 'They Treat Us Like State Property'"https://www.nysfocus.com/2021/12/09/rikers-women-transfer-bedford-hills-salazar/

Though plans to close the Rikers complex have been in place for years, and hundreds of people have been transferred from the island, conditions at Rikers continue to be unlivable. In January 2022, hundreds of people incarcerated at Rikers participated in a five-day hunger strike in protest of both increased restriction of activities (time outdoors, phone calls) and unsafe sanitary conditions due to the Covid-19 pandemic. While conditions at Rikers have always been concerning, things have only gotten worse in the pandemic, as those inside suffer from a lack of personal protective equipment and an inability to distance from one another. Despite consistent demands to release people and thereby alleviate crowded conditions, the state has yet to comply on any broadly impactful level.

As evidenced by this case study, an abolitionist discipline must be just as multifaceted as state discipline – it requires knowledge of the law, commitment to community and solidarity, and bold, courageous hope that makes demands and takes action. The abolitionist discipline, responding to the variety of punitive tactics used by the state, does not wait for emancipation, but rather takes freedom where and when it can.

IV. Elements of Abolition as Spiritual Discipline

As I read through writings from incarcerated abolitionists, common themes emerged as crucial components of the spiritual discipline of abolition: hope, imagination, community, duty, solidarity, education. I will summarize each of these themes and how they contribute to a spiritual discipline that can be taken on by individuals and communities.[39]

Hope

"Hope doesn't preclude feeling sadness or frustration or anger or any other emotion that makes sense. Hope isn't an emotion, you know? Hope is not optimism… Hope is a discipline." – Mariame Kaba[40]

It can be tempting to get trapped in a web of despair when confronted with systems of harm that seem impossible to overcome. Abolitionist organizer, educator, and writer Mariame Kaba reminds us that despair is valid and cannot be dismissed, but that we should cultivate hope alongside it. Hope orients us toward what we can do rather than how we are limited; it affirms the power of our individual and collective spirits to create change in big and small ways every day. Hope is the driving principle of abolition, what gives us cause to continue and know that our efforts are not in vain. Hope is manifest in a daily turn toward freedom. As Victor Martinez declared during the New York City Jail Rebellion of 1970, "we are going to create a paradise out of this hell."[41]

---

[39] I have adapted this section of the paper for a zine titled "Abolition as Spiritual Discipline." The zine features art, poetry, extra resources, suggested actions, and questions for reflection and can be found here: https://www.flipsnack.com/abolitionasdiscipline/abolition-as-spiritual-discipline.html

[40] Kaba, Mariame, Naomi Murakawa, and Tamara K Nopper. 2021. *We Do This 'til We Free Us*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books. pp. 26-27

[41] Burton, Orisanmi. "Organized Disorder: The New York City Jail Rebellion of 1970." *The Black Scholar*, vol. 48, no. 4, Routledge, 2018, pp. 28–42, https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.2018.1514925. pp. 35

Imagination

"We must focus upon what we must put in the place of prisons, and whether what we demand or propose will really eliminate the evils being objected to… Let us begin working at the edges of what is possible." – Tito Attallah Salah-El[42]

A daily practice of hope requires imagination, thinking beyond and without the box. Our imagination must be radical in that it wholly rejects the status quo, conceiving of a new world made for freedom with "life-sustaining systems that reduce, prevent, and better address harm".[43] One such example of this practice is the tradition of the Black radical imagination, described by Robin DG Kelly as "a collective imagination engaged in an actual movement for liberation. It is fundamentally a product of struggle, of victories and losses, crises and openings, and endless conversations circulating in a shared environment".[44] Imagination is not a solitary project, but one most effective and fulfilling when done in community.

Community

"If I could do it alone, it would have been done. But this requires a collective effort and we must work together." – Albert "Nuh" Washington[45]

The most radical component of abolitionist tradition is its community-centered approach. It is radical in the sense that it plainly rejects the individualist orientation that undergirds our current society in favor of a community-based structure that has wonderfully different priorities and thereby produces wonderfully different outcomes. If we lose sight of community, we find ourselves in danger of replicating the same harm inflicted upon us by the state.

---

[42] *The New Abolitionists.* pp. 71, 74
[43] Mohapatra, Raven, Amuchie, Sultan, Agbebiyi, Hamid, Herskind, Purnell, Dru, Kuo. *8 to Abolition: Abolitionist Policy Changes to Demand from Your City Officials.* 8toAbolition.com, 2020.
[44] Kelley, Robin D. G. *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. Beacon Press, 2002. pp. 150
[45] *Can't Jail the Spirit,* pp. 15

This focus on community does not disregard the self – quite the opposite. The abolitionist tradition places immense, equal value on each human (and often nonhuman) life, and emphasizes human dignity for all. In the abolitionist tradition, the self is nested in community; the co-constituted parts cannot be separated. When one of us has our dignity violated, the rest of us mobilize to restore it. The self is accountable to the community.

Duty

"It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love each other and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains." – Assata Shakur[46]

Duty further resists the individualizing nature of our society. Many of us have been taught to put our personal desires over the desires of other individuals or any collective desire, if we can even imagine that a collective desire exists.

Duty communicates the urgency and weight of the fight for freedom. While individual desires may waver and change, our duty to one another remains the same. In an abolitionist commitment, failure by any individual person to fulfill this duty does not lead to punitive discipline, as is the default response of the state. This is a collective duty, as emphasized by Assata's use of "*our* duty;" failure to fulfill this collective duty means that we fail to achieve collective freedom. We fulfill this duty not for fear of punishment on this earth or in our afterlives, but for fear of never getting free. Within the abolitionist tradition, duty is the articulation and practice of collective desire for freedom.

What we might do as individuals in service of this duty depends on our social and physical location, but is always rooted in solidarity.

[46] Shakur, Assata, and Angela Davis. 2014. *Assata*. Vol. 55060. London: Zed Books. pp. 64

Solidarity through Sacrifice

"It is our conviction that the oppressor can only be defeated if people are willing to pull together and sacrifice for one another. This is the true meaning of solidarity." – Gerald Gross, chairman of the Martin Sostre Defense Committee[47]

Solidarity requires sacrifice. Solidarity is risky and oppositional; it places us in tension with the oppressor, often represented by the state, thereby opening us up to discipline and violence. Solidarity also requires a significant amount of humility; it requires a belief that what we want is not the most significant thing in any given moment, and that sacrificing our individual desires for the collective is worthwhile.

Solidarity does not mean martyrdom, though some may pledge their life to a certain cause. The best solidarity is carried out in community, where sacrifice will be met with support and care by others, where pouring out will never lead to emptiness but space to be refilled.

Education

"All demands made upon the state by people's organizations should be widely exposed, and each step in the process should be analyzed, discussed, summed up, and the lessons shared with the masses. This is part of the process of mass political education… more covers will be pulled off, more consciousness will develop." – Yaki (James Sayles)[48]

The abolitionist approach to education resists gate-keeping and elitist structures, and instead pushes for the democratization of knowledge. "True" knowledge is not only found in the classroom, where histories and present realities are often erased and overwritten, but in the street, in community, and even (especially) in prison. Incarcerated people "learn to remain sane, to survive physically, and at the same time to continue resisting" in ways that are necessary and instructive for us all.[49] An abolitionist education recognizes that the first step in dismantling

[47] Sostre, Martin. 1969. *Letters from Prison*. Buffalo: Martin Sostre Defense Committee. Gerald Gross, pp. 13
[48] *The New Abolitionists*. pg 188
[49] *The New Abolitionists*. Dachine Rainer and Holley Cantine, pg 5

unjust systems is to understand how they came about and how they function; though abolitionists are often dismissed as ungrounded, unrealistic dreamers that don't know how anything works, nothing could be further from the truth. Abolitionists, guided by those of us who are incarcerated and living in the belly of the beast, carefully study existing systems so as to not reproduce the same conditions in the world we are building. Education inspires people to action, bringing us closer to realizing the world for which we hope.

V. Conclusion

As of January 2022, New York state incarcerates 30,746 people and has nearly the same amount under parole at 31,884. The Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) manages 50 facilities, down from 68 in 2011. Since 1999, the New York prison population has declined by 59.7 percent, and in 2007, the state legislature passed a law banning private prisons.[50] As a state that already has one of the lowest incarceration rates in the nation, New York makes a great candidate for decarceration – New York set the standard for prisons with Auburn, and it could too set the standard for a path toward freedom for all. In countless moments of crisis throughout US history, prison systems could have released people as a solution. In the midst of overcrowding, limited resources, and high illness and death rates, administrators and lawmakers could have chosen decarceration, but instead chose to expand the size and scope of the carceral system, rarely resulting in any material improvements for those incarcerated. During this moment of crisis in the Covid-19 pandemic, we can still demand the freedom one woman in Rikers desires:

Free Write

I just want to be
free. Can you feel the free in me?
Free to love, free to give
free to be whomever I want to
be. Free to smile, laugh or cry
free to speak my mind and tell
you why. Free, free to be, free
to live a victorious life. Or just
plain free to be me.

Jazzy[51]

[50] Statistics in this paragraph taken from DOCCS January 2022 monthly report. https://doccs.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2022/01/doccs-fact-sheet-january-2022.pdf
[51] Can You Feel The Free In Me: Writing from Rikers Island. 2018. *NY Writers Coalition*. pp. 42

Bibliography

Abolition Collective. 2020. *Making Abolitionist Worlds*. La Vergne: Common Notions.

[Attica revolt], 1971. Papers of Angela Y. Davis, 1937-2017 (inclusive), 1968-2006 (bulk), MC 940, 56.1.. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute. pp. 3-4

Baxter, Carolyn. 1979. *Prison Solitary, and Other Free Government Services*. Vol. 41. Greenfield Center, N.Y: Greenfield Review Press.

Bass, S. Jonathan, Martin Luther King, and Project Muse. 2021. *Blessed Are the Peacemakers : Martin Luther King Jr., Eight White Religious Leaders, and the "Letter from Birmingham Jail"* Baton Rouge, Louisiana]: Louisiana State University Press.

Boyce Davies, Carole. 2008. *Left of Karl Marx: the Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Burton, Orisanmi. "Organized Disorder: The New York City Jail Rebellion of 1970." *The Black Scholar*, vol. 48, no. 4, Routledge, 2018, pp. 28–42, https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.2018.1514925.

Bukhari, Safiya. 2009. *The War before: the True Life Story of Becoming a Black Panther, Keeping the Faith in Prison, and Fighting for Those Left Behind*. New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York.

Can You Feel The Free In Me: Writing from Rikers Island. 2018. *NY Writers Coalition*.

Can't Jail the Spirit: Political Prisoners in the U.S.: a Collection of Biographies. 1989. Chicago, Ill.: Editorial El coquí

Clark, Emily. 2017. "Religion and Race in America Religion and Race in America." Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History.

Daniels, Brandy. 2019. "Abolition Theology? Or, the Abolition of Theology? Towards a Negative Theology of Practice." *Religions (Basel, Switzerland)* 10 (3): 192. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10030192.

Desta, Yoseph T. 2019. "Striking the Right Balance: Toward a Better Understanding of Prison Strikes." *Harvard Law Review* 132 (5): 1490–1519.

DOCCS January 2022 monthly report. *Department of Corrections and Community Supervision*. https://doccs.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2022/01/doccs-fact-sheet-january-2022.pdf

Douglas, Kelly Brown. 2015. *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*. Orbis Books.

Felber, Garrett. 2020. *Those Who Know Don't Say*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Geneva, Tana. "Women Sent from Rikers to Maximum-Security Prison: 'They Treat Us Like State Property.'" https://www.nysfocus.com/2021/12/09/rikers-women-transfer-bedford-hills-salazar/

Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. 2007. *Golden Gulag :prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. 2020. *The Case for Prison Abolition: Ruth Wilson Gilmore on COVID-19, Racial Capitalism & Decarceration*. Democracy Now. The Case for Prison Abolition: Ruth Wilson Gilmore on COVID-19, Racial Capitalism & Decarceration. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1HWqYANmWLY.

Haley, Sarah. 2020. "Abolition." In *Keywords for African American Studies*, 8:9–14. New York, USA: New York University Press. https://doi.org/10.18574/9781479810253-002.

hooks, bell. 2000. *All About Love New Visions*. 1st ed. New York: William Morrow.

James, Joy. 2005. *The New Abolitionists: (neo) Slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.

Kaba, Mariame. 2014. "Prison Reform's In Vogue and Other Strange Things…" *Truthout*, https://truthout.org/articles/prison-reforms-in-vogue-and-other-strange-things/

Kaba, Mariame, Naomi Murakawa, and Tamara K Nopper. 2021. *We Do This 'til We Free Us*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books.

Kelley, Robin D. G. *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. Beacon Press, 2002.

Law, Victoria. 2012. *Resistance Behind Bars: The Struggles of Incarcerated Women*. Oakland, CA: PM Press. pg. 167

Lewisohn, Adolph. 1913. "ABOLISH SING SING; And Build a Farm Industrial Prison in Its Stead." *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/1913/11/27/archives/abolish-sing-sing-and-build-a-farm-industrial-prison-in-its-stead.html

Mahony, William. 2005. "Spiritual Discipline." *Encyclopedia of Religion*.

Marable, Manning. 2011. *Malcolm X : a Life of Reinvention*. New York: Viking.

Mohapatra, Raven, Amuchie, Sultan, Agbebiyi, Hamid, Herskind, Purnell, Dru, Kuo. 2020. *8 to Abolition: Abolitionist Policy Changes to Demand from Your City Officials.* 8toAbolition.com.

National Institute of Justice. 2016. "Five Things About Deterrence," U.S. Department of Justice, https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/247350.pdf

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. 2018. *Wrestling with the Devil : a Prison Memoir*. New York: The New Press.

Ostrow, Ronald. 1986. "1984 Crime Control Act Leads to 32% Rise in Prisoners". *Los Angeles Times*. https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1986-01-09-mn-14186-story.html

"Prisons: History - The Auburn Plan." *Law Library - American Law and Legal Information*. https://law.jrank.org/pages/1776/Prisons-History-Auburn-plan.html

Reed, Austin, and Caleb Smith. 2016. *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*. First edition. New York: Random House.

Robinson, Cedric J. 2020. *Black Marxism*. Revised and updated third edition. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

Rodriguez, Dylan. 2019. "Abolition as Praxis of Human Being: A Foreword." *Harvard Law Review* 132 (6): 1575–1612.

Shakur, Assata, and Angela Davis. 2014. *Assata*. Vol. 55060. London: Zed Books.

Sostre, Martin. 1969. *Letters from Prison*. Buffalo: Martin Sostre Defense Committee.

Smith Act. 1940. https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/coretexts/_files/resources/texts/1940%20Smith%20Act.pdf

West, Cornel. 2019. "The Socratic/Prophetic Traditions". Alternative Radio. https://www.alternativeradio.org/products/wesc008/

Wilde, Oscar, and Vyvyan Beresford Holland. 1950. *De Profundis, : Being the First Complete and Accurate Version of 'Epistola: In Carcere et Vinculis*. [2d ed.]. London: Methuen.

Williams, Thomas Chatterson. 2016. "'The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict,' by Austin Reed." *SFGate*, https://www.sfgate.com/books/article/The-Life-and-the-Adventures-of-a-Haunted-6843028.php