ENGL 631: STUDIES IN NONFICTION PROSE
20th-Century and Contemporary American Prison Autobiographies

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Language gave me a way to keep the chaos of prison at bay and prevent it from devouring me.
Jimmy Santiago Baca

Course Description
This semester we will study the history and literature of the prison in the United States. We will begin with Douglas Blackmon’s *Slavery By Another Name* and Sarah Haley’s *No Mercy Here*. As we work to understand intersectional race and class dynamics in the expansion of the carceral state, we will also consider women’s and LGBTQ experiences in a system starkly organized by gender.

We will be reading twentieth-century and contemporary literary works primarily by imprisoned and formerly imprisoned people. Life-writing that describes time in prison provides imaginative access to a highly locked down environment. Certain subjects will recur in our readings, such as, the pain of separation from loved ones, violence and victimization, barriers to post-release life, access to books, and the cultivation of internal and communal sources of strength. Some writers conform to a conversion structure; others resist the arc toward redemption. Some situate their story within a larger historical moment; others concentrate on personal experience; many do both. I am especially interested in how writers deal with time—as passing, punishment, possibility.

You will have a chance to learn about the Appalachian Prison Book Project, a nonprofit that sends free books to imprisoned people in six states and facilitates book clubs inside prison.

we are the ones we have been waiting for
June Jordan
Contents of Syllabus
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1. Course Goals
➢ To read 20th-century and contemporary U.S. American life-writing that draws from the experience of imprisonment
➢ To study the history and politics of the prison in the United States
➢ To understand the racialized, class-based, and gendered dimensions of the criminal justice and penal systems
➢ To create a supportive intellectual and creative community
➢ To critique the field of critical prison studies

2. Learning Outcomes
By the end of the semester, students should be able to do the following:
➢ Contribute to scholarly discussions about nonfiction prison literature and prison history
➢ Identify patterns and dominant tropes in the literature
➢ Define the carceral state and the prison industrial complex
➢ Respond thoughtfully to the ideas of others
➢ Present ideas clearly and effectively in writing and speech
➢ Compose a strong analytical research essay in literary or cultural studies

3. Inclusivity Statement
The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion.

If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services. Accessibility Services is located in Suite 250 at 1085 Van Voorhis Rd (beside Applebee’s and across from the Mountaineer Station transportation center), 304-293-6700; access2@mail.wvu.edu; http://accessibilityservices.wvu.edu/.

4. Required Texts
Handouts
LaJuana Lampkins, “A Secret Injustice” in Lockdown Prison Heart
Kate Richards O’Hare, from Crime and Criminals
Willie Francis, “My Trip to the Chair”
Bryan Stevenson, from Just Mercy
Michel Foucault, excerpt from Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison
Kevin Burno, “Flies in a Cell,” Sunday Paper
Jarvis Jay Masters, from That Bird Has My Wings
Leonard Peltier, from Prison Writings: My Life Is My Sun Dance
Sheri Dwight, from Inside this Place, Not of It
Charlie Morningstar, from Inside This Place, Not of It
Lela Northcross Wakely, “One Woman Can Make a Grand Difference”
Jimmy Santiago Baca, “Coming Into Language,” from Doing Time

Readings on ECampus or Online
Douglas Blackmon, from Slavery By Another Name
Sarah Haley, “‘Like I Was A Man’: Chain Gangs, Gender, and the Domestic Carceral Sphere in Jim Crow Georgia,” Signs 39.1 (Autumn 2013)
Megan Sweeney, from Reading Is My Window
David Garland, from The Peculiar Institution (preface + intro)
Malcolm X, from Autobiography of Malcolm X
R. Dwayne Betts, “Only Once I Considered Suicide”
R. Dwayne Betts, “Could an Ex-Con Become an Attorney”
Maya Schenwar, “Beyond Survivor’s Guild: Responding to a Sibling’s Incarceration” in The Long Term
Mariame Kaba, “Circles of Grief, Circles of Healing” in The Long Term
Michelle Alexander, Forward, Inside This Place, Not of It
Leslie Brewster, in Women of Wisdom, Women’s Prison Book Club Collection
Holding Onto Sand, Men’s Prison Book Club Collection
Susan Burton, from Becoming Ms. Burton
Etheridge Knight, “Hard Rock Returns...” and “For Freckle-Faced Gerald”
Judith Clark and Kathy Boudin, Poems
Victoria Law, “Against Carceral Feminisms” in The Long Term
Monica Cosby, “A Reflection on Entering and Exiting Communities” in The Long Term
Tammy Bond, “Life on the Registry” in The Long Term
Michelle Alexander, “The New Jim Crow”
Bryan Stevenson, Commencement Address
Paul Butler, from Let’s Get Free: A Hip-Hop Theory of Justice
Che Gossett, “Abolitionist Imaginings.” Interview with Bo Brown, Reina Gossett, and Dylan Rodriguez in Captive Genders
Recommended on ECampus or Online
Mumia Abu-Jamal, excerpts from *Live from Death Row* (xv-23)
Deborah Denno, “When Willie Francis Died: The ‘Disturbing’ Story Behind One of the Eighth Amendment’s Most Enduring Standards of Risk,” *Death Penalty Stories*
Dylan Rodriguez, from *Forced Passages*
Caleb Smith, from *Prison and the American Imagination*

5. **Grading Distribution**
A) Participation 15
B) Five Reader Responses (paced) 25
C) Annotated Bibliography 15
D) Research Prospectus 5
E) 12-page Research Essay 30
F) Symposium Research Essay 10

6. **Requirements**

**A) Participation and One Big Question (15 points)**

*The Practice*
My goal in every class is to facilitate the difficult work of thinking, and I set a high bar for thoughtful and respectful exchange. Counterarguments and experiences that are not reflected in our reading list are welcome. If at any point you feel like your voice is not being heard or understood, let me know.

Participation involves active discussing and listening. If you have concerns about talking in class, make an appointment early in the semester. Participation can also include posting and commenting on our course blog.

*Big Question*
Everyone will prepare a Big Question for one class. Your question should engage broadly with the week’s reading rather than a specific work. Big Questions should not be easily answered.
B) Reader Responses (25 points)
You will compose five 500-word reader responses. Pace these responses throughout the semester.

You can focus on whatever you would like from the week’s reading. The best responses typically explore a specific question or idea and are anchored in the language of literary, historical, or theoretical works. Be sure to quote directly from the texts.

Once during the semester, you have the option to write a retrospective response. This means that you can write a response after the class has discussed a particular work. Retrospective responses must be turned in within 2 weeks of the reading.

You have the option to write one creative response. With the creative option, you can compose an additional scene, write a letter to a character or author, create a dialogue between characters from different works, or something else entirely.

***Please upload reader responses to ECampus by Sunday at 7:00 PM.

C) Annotated Bibliography (15 points)
To prepare for the final essay, you will compile an annotated bibliography with a minimum of 7 scholarly sources. Each notation should be approximately 300 words. Sources should be varied (books, book chapters, journal articles). Beyond the 7 required sources, you are welcome to include non-scholarly sources. See assignment.

D) Research Prospectus (5 points)
A 750-word summary of your research project. See assignment.

E) 12-page Research Essay (30 points)
See assignment.

F) Symposium Presentation (10 points)
At the end of the semester, we will hold a one-day symposium to showcase your work. This will be an opportunity to present your ideas and research.

7. Additional Resources

AUTOBIOGRAPHIES
Robert Burns, *I am a Fugitive from a Georgia Chain Gang!*
Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*
Angela Davis, *Autobiography of Angela Davis*
Earl Dudding, *Trail of the Dead Years*
Damien Echols, Life After Death
Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, My Life as a Political Prisoner
Piper Kerman, Orange Is the New Black
Patrice Cullors Khan, When They Call You a Terrorist
Donald Lowrie, My Life In Prison
Jarvis Jay Masters, That Bird Has My Wings
Haywood Patterson and Earl Conrad, Scottsboro Boy
Sanyika Shakur, Monster: The Autobiography of an L.A. Gang Member
Iceberg Slim, The Naked Soul
Stanley Tookie Williams, Blue Redemption

ANTHOLOGIES
Jean Casella, James Ridgeway, Sarah Shourd, eds. Hell is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement
Siobhan Dowd, ed. This Prison Where I Live: PEN Anthology
Marc Falkoff, ed. Poems from Guantánamo: The Detainees Speak
Wally Lamb, ed. Couldn’t Keep It To Myself
Robin Levi and Ayelet Walkman, eds., Inside this Place, Not of It: Narratives from Women’s Prisons
Alice Kim et. al., The Long Term: Resisting Life Sentences / Working toward Freedom

PRISON PUBLICATIONS
Fortune News (Fortune Society)
Prison Legal News https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/
American Prison Writing Archive http://www.dhinitiative.org/projects/apwa

LEGAL, HISTORICAL, AND CULTURAL STUDIES SELECTIONS
Patrick Alexander, from From Slave Ship to Supermax: Mass Incarceration, Prisoner Abuse, and the New Neo-Slave Novel (WVU E-Book)
Joanne Braxton, Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition within a Tradition
Erin L. Castro, “Racism, the Language of Reduced Recidivism, and Higher Education in Prison: Toward an Anti-Racist Praxis”
Eric Cummins, The Rise and Fall of California’s Radical Prison Movement
Angela Davis, Are Prisons Obsolete?
Colin Dayan, The Story of Cruel and Unusual
Stephen Dillon, The Queer Politics of the Prison State
Robert Ferguson, Inferno: An Anatomy of American Punishment
Bruce Franklin, Prison Literature in America: The Victim as Criminal and Artist
David Garland, Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society
Ruth Gilmore, The Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis and Opposition in Globalizing California
Lisa Guenther, Solitary Confinement: Social Death and its Afterlives
Barbara Harlow, Barred: Women, Writing and Political Detention
Joseph T. Hallinan, Going Up the River: Travels in a Prison Nation
Joy James, *Imprisoned Intellectuals*
Regina Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy*
Marc Mauer and Meda Chesney-Lind, eds., *Invisible Punishment: The Collateral Consequences of Mass Imprisonment*
Quentin Miller, ed. *Prose and Cons: Essays on Prison Literature*
James Morris, *Jailhouse Journalism*
Naomi Murakawa, *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America*
David M. Oshinsky, “Worse Than Slavery”: *Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice*
Margo V. Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism: Three Black Women of the Sixties*
Katy Ryan, ed. *Demands of the Dead: Executions, Storytelling, and Activism in the United States*
Heather Thompson, *Blood in the Water*
Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy*
Bruce Western, *Punishment and Inequality in America*

**FILMS**
*I Am A Fugitive from a Georgia Chain Gang!* Dir. Mervyn LeRoy, 1932
*The Last Mile*, Dir. Sam Bischoff, 1932
*Zoot Suit*, Dir. Luis Valdez, 1981
*Kiss of the Spiderwoman*, Dir. Hector Babenco 1985
*Weeds*, Dir. John Hancock, 1987
*Shawshank Redemption*, Dir. Frank Darabont, 1994
*Murder in the First*, Dir. Marc Rocco, 1995
*Dead Man Walking*, Dir. Tim Robbins, 1995
*Sleepers*, Dir. Barry Levinson, 1996
*Dancer in the Dark*, Dir. Lars Von Trier, 2000
*Piñero*, Dir. Leon Ishaso, 2001
*Talk to Me*, Dir. Kasi Lemmons, 2007

**DOCUMENTARY FILMS**
*13th*, Dir. Ava DuVernay, 2016
*The House I Live In*, Dir. Eugene Jarecki, 2012
*Big House–Alderson*, PBS, 1998
*Hard Road Home*, Dir. Macky Alston, 2007 (http://www.hardroadhome.org/)
*Incident at Ogalala*, Dir. Michael Apted, 1992
*Thin Blue Line*, Dir. Errol Morris, 1988
*Execution of Wanda Jean Allen*, Dir. Liz Garbus, 2002
*Shielded Brutality* (spokefilms.com), 2007
*Up the Ridge*, dirs. Amelia Kirby and Nick S Zubria
*Slavery By Another Name* http://video.pbs.org/video/2176766758/
*Solitary Confinement* http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/solitary-nation/#solitary-nation
*Say Her Name: the Life and Death of Sandra Bland*, dir Kate Davis and David Heilbroner
*Released* (it’s free via the US Attorneys Office)
PODCASTS
Ear Hustle
Justice in America

WEBSITES AND VIDEOS

Informational
Marshall Project https://www.themarshallproject.org/#.iFmMLMRae
Death Penalty Information Center http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/
Sentencing Project Interactive Map http://www.sentencingproject.org/map/map.cfm#map
Prison Culture visuals: http://www.usprisonculture.com/blog/visualizations/
ACLU Infographic on mass incarceration
Solitary Watch http://www.solonews.com/2013/05/07/battling_censorship_behind_bars_partner/
Stanford Experiment: http://zimbardo.socialpsychology.org/
Humanities Action Lab Global Dialogues on Incarceration http://humanitiesactionlab.org/globaldialogues/incarceration/

Education and Re-Entry
All of Us or None: http://www.allofusornone.org/newsite/about_us
Inside Out Center http://www.insideoutcenter.org/
Education Justice Project http://www.educationjustice.net/home/
Alabama Prison Creative Arts + Education http://apaep.auburn.edu/
Prison Studies Project http://prisonstudiesproject.org/about/
Arizona State University Prison English http://english.clas.asu.edu/prisonenglish
New Yorker article http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/12/12/the-ex-con-scholars-of-berkeley
Presentation by Arthur Longworth on LWOP: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6w8wGu7uCMk&index=7&list=PLki4QkQoB3oYf8YD10k2K9LMmUVXv
Appalachian Prison Book Project http://apprisonbookproject.wordpress.com/

Books Recommended by The Marshall Project
https://www.themarshallproject.org/books?fbclid=IwAR2ulKKnKSSv6WqeC4NZ7FSk1QtYubbJc7Qd1ZdQdzmL2npTBgiuqW5Y
8 SCHEDULE

*NOTE: This is a reading intensive class. I may, based on class dynamics, make adjustments to the reading schedule. Once we are in a groove, I will indicate which readings will be our priority each week. Consider the syllabus a resource for further reading and research.

Jan 7
What it might help me to know. Introductions.
Syllabus. Sign Up for Big Question Day. Intro to Renaldo Hudson
Clips from *Slavery By Another Name* (1-17.00; 59:25-1:09:35; 1:20:30-end)

**Emancipation, with an Exception: Prison Labor**

Jan 14
Anonymous, “Autobiography of an Imprisoned Peon” (1903) [Handout/ECampus]
Douglas Blackmon, from *Slavery By Another Name* - Introduction, Chapter XV, and Epilogue [ECampus]

**Big Question  Gabe**

Recommended:
Article on Austin Reed’s *The Life and Adventures of a Haunted Convict, or the Inmate of a Gloomy Prison*


Video on Angola: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ABpWhY5Xzk

Jan 21—Martin Luther King, Jr Day

Jan 28
Jack London, “‘Pinched’: A Prison Experience” and “Pen” (1894)
http://carl-bell.baylor.edu/jl/Pinched.html
Kate Richards O'Hare, from *Crime and Criminals* (1921) [Handout/ECampus]

Michel Foucault, from *Discipline and Punish* [Handout/ECampus]

H. Bruce Franklin, Introduction to *Prison Writing in 20th-Century America* [ECampus]

Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions, “An Open Letter to our Friends on the Question of Language” [Handout]

**Big Question → Matthew and Jordan**

Recommended:
Adam Gopnick, “Learning from the Slaughter in Attica”


**State-Killing, Solitary, and Captivity**

Feb 4
Willie Francis, “My Trip to the Chair” (1947) [Handout/E Campus]

Bryan Stevenson, from *Just Mercy* [Handout/Ecampus]

David Garland, from *Peculiar Institution* [E Campus]

Dwayne Betts, “Only Once I Considered Suicide” [handout/E Campus]

In Class: *Witness to an Execution*

**Big Question → Megan and Kacey**

Recommended:

Jack Abbott and Norman Mailer, *In the Belly of the Beast: Letters from Prison*

Views from Solitary – Photographs
Mumia Abu-Jamal, Commencement Address:
http://www.prisonradio.org/media/audio/mumia/goddard-commencement-speech-1054-mumia-abu-jamal

Deborah W. Denno, “When Willie Francis Died . . .” [Ecampus]

Damien Nichols
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/how-making-art-on-death-row-saved-damien-echols-life_us_570c0ff0e4b0885fb50e0224

“To Murder Victims’ Families Executing Killers is Justice”

Murder Victims Families for Reconciliation http://www.mvfr.org/

Murder Victims Families for Human Rights http://www.mvfhr.org/

Optional
Feb 9 (Saturday) APBP Training Day 10:00-12:00 Aull Center, 351 Spruce St.

Feb 11

Kevin Burno, “Flies in a Cell,” *Sunday Paper* [handout/ECampus]

Antoine Beach-Bey, “Organized Chaos” [handout/Ecampus]

**Big Question ➔ Gabriella**

Recommended:
Atul Gawande, “Hell-hole”
http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/03/30/hellhole


Visual Art / Fly in the Ointment
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CUs8K1jZEvs&feature=youtu.be

Michael Hames-García, *Fugitive Justice*, chap. 3 [See Google Books]

http://humanities.williams.edu/joy-james/

Reading and Writing Practices

Feb 18

Jimmy Santiago Baca, “Coming Into Language” [handout/ECampus]


Megan Sweeney, from Reading Is My Window [ECampus]

Big Question → Cristl

Recommended:
Angela Davis, Autobiography of Angela Davis
https://wasicollectif.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/angela-davis-autobiography.pdf

Interview with Angela Davis and Toni Morrison
http://news.ucsc.edu/2014/10/morrison-davis-q-a.html

Conversation with Angela Davis and Toni Morrison
http://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/angela-davis-and-toni-morrison-in-conversation-literacy-libraries-and-liberation/#.VHxnc3tjNK0.facebook


Feb 25
John Edgar Wideman, Brothers and Keepers

Maya Schenwar, “Beyond Survivor’s Guild: Responding to a Sibling’s Incarceration” in The Long Term [ECampus]

Access to Books / Censorship

**Guantanamo Diary**
http://www.democracynow.org/2015/1/22/inside_the_us_torture_chambers_prisoners

**Big Question  → Anna**

Recommended:
Jeanne Marie Laskas, “Inside the Federal Bureau of Way Too Many Guns”


**Mar 4**


Etheridge Knight, “Hard Rock Returns...” and “For Freckle-Faced Gerald”
[handout/ECampus]


Mariame Kaba, “Circles of Grief, Circles of Healing” in *The Long Term* [ECampus]

**Big Question  → Kenneth**

Recommended:
Betts on BookTV https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SD_iLRYYOfE


National Crime Victims Law Institute / History of Victims' Rights
https://law.lclark.edu/centers/national_crimevictim_law_institute/about_ncvli/history_of_victims_rights/

National Center for Victims of Crime

Office of Justice / Office for Victims of Crime
https://www.ovc.gov/

**Mar 9 -17 Spring Break**
Mar 18


Judith Clark and Kathy Boudin, Poems [ECampus]

Victoria Law, “Against Carceral Feminisms” in *The Long Term* [ECampus]

Sheri Dwight, from *Inside this Place, Not of It* [handout/Ecampus]

Lela Northcross Wakely, “One Woman Can Make a Grand Difference” [handout/Ecampus]

“How Incarcerated Parents are Losing their Children Forever”
https://www.themarshallproject.org/2018/12/03/how-incarcerated-parents-are-losing-their-children-forever?ref=hp-1-10

**Big Question → Ellen**

Recommended:
*What I Want My Words to Do* (documentary)

Susan Sheehan, “Does sexual abuse early in life justify later misdeeds? The case of Donna Hylton”

Elizabeth Bernstein, “Sexual Politics of the New Abolitionism” (sex trafficking)

http://www.nationalreview.com/article/422476/over-incarceration-not-making-america-safer

Mar 25

**DUE: Annotated Bibliography (by end of week)**


Jarvis Jay Masters, from *That Bird Has My Wings* [Ecampus]

**Big Question → Vince**
Recommended:
Leonard Peltier, from *Prison Writings: My Life is My Sun Dance*
[handout/Ecampus]

**WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

**Apr 1**

**DUE: Research Prospectus (by end of week)**

Leslie Brewster, 2 essays in *Women of Wisdom* [Ecampus]

Susan Burton, from *Becoming Ms. Burton*

Michelle Alexander, “The New Jim Crow” [handout/Ecampus]

In-class: *13* (documentary film)

**Big Question → Elana**

**Apr 8**

Monica Cosby, “A Reflection on Entering and Exiting Communities” in *The Long Term*

Tammy Bond, “Life on the Registry” in *The Long Term*

Che Gossett, “Abolitionist Imaginings” (Interview with Bo Brown, Reina Gossett, and Dylan Rodriguez) [Ecampus]


Doran Larson, “Why Scandinavian Prisons Are Superior”

**Big Question → Kerri**
April 15

**DUE: Essay Drafts (staggered deadlines)**

Paul Butler, from *Let’s Get Free: A Hip-Hop Theory of Justice* [ECampus]


Bryan Stevenson, Commencement Address [ECampus]

**Big Question → Sarah**

Apr 22

Concluding Thoughts / New Questions

**DUE: Final Essays (staggered deadlines)**

Saturday, April 27 (if this works for everyone?): Prison Autobiographies Symposium