Abolition and Liberation: An Interchange on Teaching behind the Walls

Dan Berger, Catherine L. Besteman, Michelle Daniel Jones, Leo Hylton, Elizabeth Nelson, Steve Wilson

The participants in this interchange were brought together by Stevie Wilson, in the face of considerable logistical challenges. Wilson lives behind prison walls—with standard electronic modes of communication not available or quite circumscribed. In particular, e-mail access was limited. Messages cost money to send and were limited to two thousand characters—more than Twitter, to be sure, but not conducive to scholarly communication. E-mail correspondence was also subject to screening from prison authorities and could take days to reach Wilson. Nor could Wilson receive attachments or access the Internet.

Despite these obstacles, Wilson recruited the participants and, over the course of 2022, was able to assemble their contributions. He and the *JAH* editors worked together to formulate the questions and issues that structured the dialogue, with Wilson having the final say. The *JAH* editors worked with all the contributors, but only to pose queries and use standard editorial practices to refine prose. This fascinating and powerfully significant interchange is, therefore, primarily a product of the prison workshop, relying most of all on Wilson's determination and steadfastness.

The contributing editors and the *JAH* thank Garrett Felber for his generative role in this interchange, particularly in connecting the editors with Wilson, and are indebted to all the participants for their willingness to enter into this conversation:

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Catherine L. Besteman is an abolitionist educator at Colby College. Her research and practice engage the public to explore abolitionist possibilities in Maine. In addition to coordinating Freedom & Captivity, a humanities initiative for abolition, she has researched and published on security, militarism, displacement, and community-based activism and transformation, focused on Somalia, South Africa, and the United States. Her recent work has been supported by fellowships from the American Council of Learned Societies, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation. Readers may contact Besteman at catherine.besteman@colby.edu.

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Michelle Daniel Jones is a sixth-year doctoral student in the American studies program at New York University. Her dissertation focuses on the creative liberation strategies of incarcerated women and the Alabama Prison Arts and Education Project. As an organizer, collaborator, and subject-matter expert she creates opportunities to speak truth to power and serves in the development and operation of task forces and initiatives to reduce harm and end mass incarceration. She has joined Second Chance Educational Alliance as a senior research consultant and the Survivors Justice Project. She also serves on the boards of Worth Rises and the Correctional Association of New York, and on the advisory boards of the Jamii Sisterhood, the Education Trust, A Touch of Light, the Urban Institute, and ITHAKA's Higher Education in Prison Research project. She is a founding member and board president of Constructing Our Future, a reentry and housing organization for women created by incarcerated women in Indiana. She has been awarded fellowships from Beyond the Bars, Harvard University's Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History, and Code for America. She has also been named a Ford Foundation Bearing Witness Fellow with Art for Justice; a SOZE Foundation Right of Return Fellow; a Mural Arts Rendering Justice Fellow; and an Artist for the People Practitioner Fellow at the Human Rights Lab/Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture at the University of Chicago. She (and her coeditor Elizabeth Nelson) are currently under contract with the New Press to publish the edited history of Indiana's carceral institutions for women with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated colleagues titled *Who Would Believe a Prisoner? Indiana Women's Carceral Institutions, 1848–1920*, available April 2023. As an artist, she is interested in finding ways to funnel her research pursuits into theater, dance, and photography. Her original play, *The Duchess of Stringtown*, coauthored with Anastazia Schmid, was produced in Indianapolis in 2017 and in New York City in 2018, and her artist installation about stigma, "Point of Triangulation: Intersections of Identity," ran at the New York University Gallatin Galleries, the Beyond the Bars Conference at Columbia University, the African American Museum in Philadelphia, and Mural Arts Philadelphia. Readers may contact Daniel Jones at mcj320@nyu.edu.

Leo Hylton is a recent Master's graduate of the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University. His education and work are based in trauma-informed and healing-centered approaches to restorative justice practices and are now focused on social justice advocacy and activism, envisioning an abolitionist future. Toward that end, he is working as a visiting instructor in anthropology at Colby College, coteaching Ay346 Carcerality and Abolition. He contributed to and helped organize the abolitionist humanities initiative, Freedom & Captivity. He is a lead facilitator of the Maine State Prison's Restorative Practices Steering Committee, is on Colby College's Restorative Practices Team, and provides consultation to restorative justice practitioners in the United States and abroad. Hylton works at Think Peace Learning and Support Hub as the transitional justice course coordinator. He serves on the advisory council of the Truth Telling Project and on the board of directors of the Mindbridge Center, supporting their work on truth telling and reparations, and human rights and racial healing through a neuroscience lens, respectively. He is a core organizer of the Carter School Working Group on Forgiveness and Reconciliation, creating spaces of colearning, growth, and trauma healing in the context of forgiveness and reconciliation. He is also a columnist for the publication *Mainer*, writing a monthly column to raise public awareness of the existence and power of humanity in carceral spaces. Hylton's education, work, and research are informed by his experience as a currently incarcerated citizen in Maine State Prison, discussed in his scholarly article, “Trauma, Spirituality, and Healing: A Journey through the Lens of an Incarcerated Person,” published in the March 2022 issue of *Religions*. Readers may contact Hylton at lhylton@colby.edu.

Elizabeth Nelson is an assistant professor in the Medical Humanities and Health Studies Program at Indiana University–Purdue University, Indianapolis and an adjunct assistant professor of Africana studies and history. Nelson's primary research interests, as a medical historian, center on modern institutions of confinement such as mental hospitals and prisons in both the United States and France. She also coordinates the Indiana Women's Prison History Project (Iwphp), a group of currently and formerly incarcerated scholars who produce original research on the histories of gender and the carceral state in the United States. Nelson is coeditor, with Daniel Jones, of the Iwphp edited collection *Who Would Believe a Prisoner? Indiana Women's Carceral Institutions, 1848–1920*, forthcoming in 2023 with the New Press. These essays grew out of the recurring graduate class, The History Project, at the heart of the Iwp's non-degree-granting, volunteer-led higher education program. Students in the course pursue individual research topics, and class time is largely devoted to one-on-one mentoring as the students gather primary and secondary sources, interpret those sources, and craft historical arguments for publication. Readers may contact Nelson at eanelson@indiana.edu.

Stevie Wilson is currently incarcerated in Pennsylvania. He is a Black, queer, abolitionist organizer. He facilitates abolitionist study groups inside, including 9971. He is a columnist for the *Abolitionist*, a newspaper published by Critical Resistance. His work has appeared in *Radical History Review*, *Abolitionist Journal*, *Black Perspectives*, and *Dazed*. Readers can view his work on the blog *Dreaming Freedom, Practicing Abolition*, and can follow him on Twitter @agitateorganize.

Stevie Wilson: When I was invited to contribute to the *Journal of American History*, I initially planned an essay relating my experiences teaching and facilitating study groups in three Pennsylvania state prisons. After much thought, I felt it was necessary to deepen the well from which I was drawing. My experiences are those of a currently incarcerated abolitionist organizer

who primarily teaches other imprisoned people. Yet, I also wanted to include the experiences of others, not necessarily similarly situated. I was fortunate to have my comrade Dan Berger join the discussion. While Dan hasn't formally taught classes inside, he has been and remains a supporter of and participant in study groups inside. Dan connected me to Elizabeth Nelson, who brought Michelle Daniel Jones onboard. Elizabeth and Michelle are part of the Indiana Women's Prison History Project and bring an often-overlooked perspective to the table. More fortuitously, I was introduced to the work of and connected to Catherine Besteman and Leo Hylton. Catherine has formally taught behind the walls, and she teaches about carcerality to outside students. Leo, a currently incarcerated graduate student, has taught outside college students. While incarcerated! That may be a first. We are all abolitionists. We have teaching and colearning experiences. But our standpoints are not the same. I think these different positions make this discussion more fruitful and interesting. I hope you do too.

I thank the participants in this discussion and the staff at the *Journal of American History* for their patience in dealing with the logistics of producing this interchange. Prison walls and fences are designed to render impossible an event such as this, but your patience and generosity of spirit have made this conversation possible, thwarting the plans of the prison-industrial complex to isolate and alienate those behind the walls.

I want to begin our discussion by sharing my own path to teaching behind the walls and asking the participants to do so too. Prior to incarceration, I had been a community organizer and remained interested in social justice issues after my incarceration. I continued to study and was introduced to abolitionist theory and organizing by another imprisoned person. After years of study and research, I began to share what I had learned and practiced with other imprisoned people. This was done informally at first, in the yard or walking the track. The number of people interested in abolition increased, and I found I couldn't continue the one-on-one sessions and reach everyone who wanted to study. I began to organize study groups inside the prison, holding weekly sessions with four different groups. This is how my teaching behind the walls began.

Catherine L. Besteman: For decades I have studied militarism, security, displacement, and racial capitalism in the United States, Somalia, and South Africa. Over the past five years, my attention turned toward carcerality in the United States, which is, of course, deeply connected to things I've spent thirty years researching and fighting against. Maine has six prisons, which hold around two thousand people. As I began to learn more about incarceration in Maine, I found my way to abolitionist organizing, which has become my scholarly, pedagogical, and personal focus. During fall 2021, I created and ran a statewide public humanities initiative on envisioning abolition in Maine called Freedom & Captivity, which brought me into direct collaboration with folks inside. During fall 2021, at one of the women's prisons I cotaught a course that enrolled an equal number of students on campus at Colby College, where I teach, and students inside. The following semester, I invited Leo Hylton to coteach with me at Colby, inverting the standard inside-out and prison education models of an outside teacher going inside to teach. I am invested in building new models for how to bring inside and outside students and faculty together in colearning spaces.

Leo Hylton: My graduate studies coincided with my growth as a Restorative Justice (Rj) practitioner and systems change advocate and activist, which is what led to my coteaching position at Colby College with Catherine Besteman. A fellow Rj practitioner recommended me as a copresenter on an episode of the *Freedom & Captivity* podcast that was part of the greater abolitionist Freedom & Captivity project that Dr. Besteman was heading up in 2021. Engaging

with her for episode 6 was the first time we communicated directly. From there, I helped organize the collection of artwork and writing from other men incarcerated at Maine State Prison, contributed some of my poetry to the collection, and organized the contributions of several men to the short film *ABCs of Abolition*, that led to a screening late that year within the prison. Somewhere along the way, I received an invitation to speak at the Oak Institute for Human Rights about my work as an incarcerated Rj practitioner and systems change activist. I gave a "lunch talk" at the Oak Institute of Human Rights that Dr. Besteman listened to on her way to work one morning, and that presentation moved her to approach her provost for approval to have me teach with her. After securing the provost's approval, Dr. Besteman e-mailed me to gauge my interest. I quickly and enthusiastically responded in the affirmative and encouraged her to reach out to the Maine Department of Corrections commissioner for his approval. Shortly thereafter, we were e-mailing back and forth and engaging in regular Zoom sessions, putting together the curriculum, figuring out how we wanted to hold space with each other and the students, and finding out how opposite our teaching styles were.[1]

Dan Berger: I wouldn't say that I teach behind the walls. I study with people inside, some involving my mentorship but also me being mentored. I have not taught a traditional class in prison, either of mixed enrollment (that is, incarcerated and nonincarcerated people) or of just prisoners. I have given talks inside at the invitation of groups inside. I've always thought my job is to talk about how bad prisons are, and I don't need to go inside to do that. But to the extent I am involved in pedagogical situations behind the walls, it is because I've been inspired by requests from incarcerated comrades to support their collective educational efforts.

Wilson: Catherine and Leo, could you comment on how prison circumscribes knowledge acquisition and production?

Besteman: Teaching a course that brings outside and inside students together is as much about community building and colearning as it is about knowledge acquisition. A lot of barriers have to do with ensuring students are allowed to communicate with each other and with their faculty outside of class time, independent of carceral supervision…. Colearning happens through community building and one of our primary fights is to ensure that outside and inside students can continue to engage each other outside of class time as Maine shifts to a new communication platform…. Maine is reconfiguring its control over communications between the outside and the inside again. My goal with all my teaching and coteaching is community building through gaining a shared understanding of carceral history and collaboratively envisioning pathways toward abolition. We are concerned to ensure that folks on the inside can retain their access to collaborators and colearners on the outside, as well as colearners in other facilities, to share their perspectives and learn from each other. Rules that circumscribe communication hinder community building for the purpose of knowledge production.

Hylton: Knowledge in prison is at once coveted, despised, and seen as dangerous by staff, prisoners, and administrators. The system itself thrives when its operators and captives remain ignorant. I go back to the quotation from Frederick Douglass that an educated slave is a discontented slave. The same is true of the prisoner who becomes educated and aware of his enslavement within a web of carcerality and oppression, both external and internal. Rather than disrupting cycles of crime and harm in communities, the prison system exacerbates them. While the current staff and administration of the Maine Department of Corrections have made meaningful strides toward transforming life on the inside (for both staff and prisoners), it has done so in the face of an intergenerationally traumatic prison culture that still covers most of the

nation. As a rule, knowledge acquisition and production in carceral settings must be done in line with carceral logics. Any teacher, professor, or volunteer who does not conform (or at least does not perform conformity) does not last long. Any group of incarcerated scholars seeking to raise the consciousness of their fellow captives in a way that is meaningfully emancipatory will be shut down as disruptive. This is the general understanding among the prison population that prevents the bold teaching of abolitionist curricula and/or transformative collaborative colearning.[2]

Wilson: Much of the public believes that anyone who wants to access educational or therapeutic programming inside is given the opportunity. This is untrue. Programs like the one you are involved in are rare and restrictive. Who actually benefits from prison education?

Besteman: Right now, in Maine, there is a long waiting list of students hoping to access college classes. Opportunities inside to join college classes have been more accessible for men than women, and the racial breakdown of student enrollment in college classes does not reflect the racial breakdown in Maine's prisons. So, there are inequities by race and gender that need to be addressed. Furthermore, 18–38 percent of the people sent to prison in Maine have not graduated from high school, so a supported educational pathway for all students that builds self-confidence, self-awareness, and communication skills must be ensured.[3]

HYlton: Everyone and no one. The benefits of postsecondary education are real and meaningful, even of the liberal studies, white-savior variety so common in carceral settings, with a white professor coming into a prison to save the ignorant heathens and teach us how to perform rehabilitation and conformation to the model of law-abiding citizens who are worthy of release to a world that brands us as felons and refuses to hire us or provide us opportunity for a living wage, affordable or acceptable housing, or adequate health care. This model of prison education afforded me the opportunity to attain my associate's and bachelor's degrees and provided me the foundation upon which I am about to graduate with my master's degree. Between my mentor, my hospice teacher, my professors, college support people, and key prison staff and administrators, I was assisted in rediscovering my worth, dignity, humanity, and compassion…. Even the men who do not or cannot participate in the college program benefit because those of us who have attained degrees are the same ones who yearn for greater opportunities to help others. We end up being the peer facilitators, teaching classes and tutoring and mentoring others. However, when I think about all the people who cycle in and out of prison each year, I see huge swaths of people being hidden by the shadow of exceptionalism: Look over here at all the people getting degrees and taking programs! Don't look over there at those suffering too much to heal or those who have lived too much to conform. With a critical eye, I see a system of harm perpetuated by masterful sleight of hand that has been refined for generations with a target on poor Black and brown people, in particular, and poor people in general.

Wilson: As an imprisoned organizer and facilitator, I don't see prison as a necessarily alternative teaching space. Both Malcolm X and Martin Sostre described prison as maximum security and “free” society, especially poor urban areas—as minimum security—also a standard talking point of the Black Panthers. For many students in these minimum-security areas, school is not only a pipeline to prison but also preparation for it. They endure pat downs and metal detectors just as prisoners do. The emphasis is on discipline, not learning. And only the most remedial education is offered. What prisoners experience and what these students experience differs little.[4]

Moreover, in both spaces, the state is the final arbiter of what can and cannot be taught, who can and cannot teach, and what materials will and won't be allowed. So, I don't see prison as necessarily an alternative teaching space. But it can be.

For that to happen, the emphasis, materials, and teachers would have to be different. The emphasis and materials would have to be liberatory. The teaching would be akin to Walter Rodney's “groundings.” To survive state repression, the form would have to be collective, nonhierarchical, and inconspicuous. The purpose would differ greatly from what is currently offered. Education in prison seeks to produce docile, low-wage workers who will not challenge the status quo. Even when the university, another arm of the state, partners with the prison, not much changes. The status quo is still upheld.[5]

Elizabeth Nelson: I agree with Stevie Wilson's critique of prison as an “alternative” space—prison works alongside and with other sorts of institutions, such as schools and universities, to perpetuate social structures. That doesn't mean real education cannot happen *in* a prison (or other institutional spaces). However, real education is never *of* the prison. The essence of a prison is in inherent conflict with efforts to support human connection and intellectual flourishing. There is a certain level of negotiation and accommodation that teachers who want to work in prisons must be willing to accept to gain access to the students inside. I've come to believe that truly liberatory teaching and learning inside prisons must be done with a spirit of fugitivity and subterfuge. Prison administrators may wish to take credit for the programs you bring in or regard them according to the prison's logic of rehabilitation. But you can use that as cover. The Iwphp focused on historical research in part because history seemed nonthreatening to the prison administration. Nevertheless, the assumed harmlessness of engaging students in research on the nineteenth century cloaked a radical project. There were risks involved in this—I have constantly expected my access to the prison to be revoked at any minute—but for the students the risks were considerably greater.

Michelle Daniel Jones: The risk of losing our project and the opportunity that it afforded us was very real. At any point the program could be gone, and so with that knowledge we chose to walk a fine line of protecting the project while presenting an analysis of the history and the carceral state that applied to our current conditions. Savvy and subversive, we offered a critique of our current experiences through an analysis of the nineteenth century, drawing pertinent parallels.

Our method considers the reality and the everyday consequences of living in prison. At no point would facility staff or the Indiana Department of Corrections permit us to research our *current* living conditions and experiences as incarcerated women to the same degree that we researched women and girls in the nineteenth century. The period we examined is a crucial aspect of our method. Researching, writing, and even publishing about the facility's nineteenth-century origins proved to be a “safe” project for facility authorities and the Indiana Department of Corrections, a project for which bringing primary-source data to the facility did not pose a threat. Further, presenting our research at local, state, and national conferences utilizing the facility's video conferencing equipment was also viewed as “safe.” These degrees of removal—disciplinary and chronological—are representative of method in this work.

True liberation starts with the individual and what they believe about themselves and their capacity. We had to counter the narrative that we have nothing important to share. I agree with Stevie that prisons are not spaces for liberation, but I also agree with Elizabeth that there are those who can liberate themselves mentally despite abysmal conditions of confinement that foster every kind of constriction.

The carceral geography of the prison constrains the mind, body, and spirit of incarcerated people. It is a microcosm or a reflection of the world outside which grows ever constrained and constricted, as both Stevie and Elizabeth noted. That the conditions under which education occurs in prison reflect the conditions under which education occurs outside is quite familiar to me.

I personally feel that if there's anything that makes the prison an alternative space for learning, it is that the stakes are far higher for an incarcerated person in the pursuit of education. We are/were fighting to keep our very being together, stitched together by the exercise of our minds, the work of our hands, and the upliftment of our spirits by engaging in something that matters. That struggle I feel in many ways is heavier, denser, and more critical to our survival because of the ever-present oppressive forces (overt and unseen, political and moralistic, criminalizing, gendered, sexist, and racist) pushing against our efforts to soar. There are only a few things worse than willful facilitation of atrophy of the spirit and mind.

Wilson: What, in your opinion, are the biggest differences between teaching in traditional setting and behind the walls?

Berger: The biggest difference is the structural antagonism to learning in prison, evident in the difference access to technology inside and out. Computers, tablets, and the Internet are so thoroughly integrated into the university classroom teaching at this point, in terms of synchronous meetings and the work assigned outside class. I make readings available online, I teach students how to research through online databases, and they submit assignments or we do activities online. The prison context has no such resources. The highly regulated and constricted (denial of) access to information dims the educational mission.

Hylton: Teaching from inside required a true partnership, administrative support, technological expansion, and a self-governed living unit. Among myriad other tasks, Catherine had to be present in the classroom at Colby to get the camera and Zoom set up for each class; schedule with prison staff and administrators whenever we needed to have extended meetings for grading and collaborating; and secure special permission to bring me course texts. The Department of Corrections (Doc) administration (all the way up to the commissioner) needed to approve my allowance to teach, be paid, and ultimately be hired as a faculty member at Colby. Departmental policies have been and/or are in the process of being changed to support this new capacity that wasn't supposed to be possible. When I was allowed to teach one class on campus, I was escorted by the department's head of special operations and the fugitive investigator, handcuffed to a belly-chain and restricted by hobblers on my legs during transport. When my students came to the prison for a tour, Catherine and the warden made sure there was always one of them at the back of the group of twelve students while I led them through the facility. There was nothing traditional about this teaching experience.

Besteman: For an abolitionist outside educator working in carceral settings, the contradictions are, of course, extraordinary and require a clear-eyed understanding of one's own positionality, behavior, role modeling, and humility. Emancipatory education in carceral settings is not possible, or at least is incredibly circumscribed, so the abolitionist educator in a carceral setting must recognize this and figure out how to hold colearning spaces that don't put inside students and colleagues in danger and don't conform to and/or reproduce the carceral logics and practices of the institution. People in prison live in a constant state of oppression, trauma, and mistrust. Their ability to access computers, the Internet, research materials, and their fellow classmates and teachers is entirely dependent on who is in charge of monitoring access on any given day, on

count times, on whether there are things happening inside that may block access, and other things beyond their control. So, recognizing how trauma shows up in colearning spaces, how an oppressive environment affects colearning, and how mistrust poisons social interactions is really important in acknowledging, processing, working through, and, ideally, ameliorating those conditions within the space of the classroom. The use of things such as community agreements, mutually determined guidelines for grading and assessment, peer collaborations, opportunities for one-on-one sharing, and an expectation that everyone has something of value to contribute are critical. Also important for classes that bring together outside and inside students is ensuring that the outside students are prepared to confront their preconceived assumptions about incarcerated people and their previous conceptions of carceral history and the supposed justice of the legal system. And crucial are outsiders' ability to maintain confidentiality and their willingness to subject themselves and their biases to scrutiny. The motivations and positionalities of outside teachers in inside spaces are also relevant and require a different kind of teacher self-examination than they might bring to their work in outside learning spaces, although these questions are also relevant for teaching on the outside.

Teaching in carceral spaces and/or with incarcerated people demands a different kind of personal commitment to solidarity in working toward liberation. What this means in practice will depend upon the context…. Finally, the particular positionalities beyond race and gender of incarcerated folks with whom those of us on the outside are colearning is relevant, but in ways particular to the carceral regime. It is a failure when outside educators attempt to meet everyone on the inside as if they are in the same position or experiencing incarceration the same way.

Wilson: In a truly alternative teaching space behind the walls, the purpose of teaching would be liberation and mobilization. The purpose would be to teach folx inside skills that enable them to recognize internal and external systems of oppression and learn strategies, tactics, and ideas that empower them to change themselves and their environments. They would learn histories that are mobilizing. As for methods, because this teaching is liberatory, it would have to be surreptitious. The administration wouldn't allow it. But imprisoned folx have always found ways to convey information prohibited by the officials. I am reminded of the Angola 3 and how they would conduct study sessions in the yard while pretending to play football. The guards never caught on. The teaching would have to be collective and collaborative. Depending on one person makes it easy for the administration to disrupt study. Russell Maroon Shoatz taught us the benefits of organizing as a hydra and not as a dragon. The collective would have to be nimble enough to replace people who are targeted and transferred. The work should connect the dots for the participants and meet them where they are. We need materials that show the relationship between what was and what is and between what is and what can be.[6]

Wilson: What distinctive purposes and methods come to mind when you think about teaching in carceral spaces?

Besteman: Again, I am going to emphasize my interest in using college classes as a form of community building. In the course I taught inside and in the course I coteach outside with Leo, a primary goal is to break through the potential biases, misconceptions, points of difference, trauma, mistrust, and systemic inequalities to forge connections that allow us all to grow because of being in relation to each other in a privileged space. Leo and I model a relationship based on mutual respect, intellectual reciprocity, equity, and colearning. We use our relationship to demonstrate to students how to form such relationships across the walls. One reason our criminal legal system flourishes as a system of hyperincarceration, racism, and war on the poor is because

prisons exist to disappear and silence people. So, using college classes as a way to bring people inside into community with people outside is, for me, insurgent. We are directly confronting the use of carcerality to throw people away by intentionally creating spaces and opportunities for people outside to grow connections, through colearning, with people inside. This, for me, is abolitionist love.

Berger: Teaching and learning in prison contradicts the censorious nature of incarceration itself. The lack of access to modern tools of teaching—namely, access to the Internet and online databases, plus a context of open inquiry (in both electronic and in-person communication)—necessarily forces the prison classroom to engage the more conventional modes of study. The incarcerated people I have worked with have also been collaborative in peer mentorship and support. However, the routine censorship and enforced technological silo of incarceration limits any formal prison education program's ability to be a form of reentry preparation.

Hylton: The new model that Catherine and I created is designed to teach abolition while performing abolitionist work through the building of inside-outside community partnerships, dismantling the barriers to communication and colearning in a way that disrupts the narrow perception that inside-outside education must remain in the mold of prison education. We seek to increase the exercise of agency in the lives of people on the inside, while building an avenue of deeper engagement by outside professors in cultivating actual (rather than nominal) partnerships with inside teachers/professors. We are working to dispel the stereotype and disrupt the assumptions widely held by people (inside and outside) about what an incarcerated person is/isn't capable of and what s/he will/won't do when afforded an opportunity to self-actualize in a manner less restricted by carceral mechanisms and logics.

Nelson: The Iwphp has a complex and interlocking set of purposes. In some ways our purposes mirror those of any other higher education program: preparing students for even higher levels of educational achievement and for careers. Michelle's outstanding work in the Iwphp, for example, was instrumental in her earning a place in the American studies Ph.D. program at New York University, but, as she stated, the stakes of this trajectory carry more weight, are far denser, than for most.

There is a running tension in how we define success in our work, as we want all our students to develop their full capacities to flourish in this world, but we also want to do our part in remaking the world. I agree with Stevie that making connections—connecting students' lived experiences to social, political, and, in our case, historical contexts—is crucial for both. These explorations helped our students make sense of their situation, and they informed the many forms of activism they've engaged in to improve the lives of currently and formerly incarcerated people, including sounding the alarm about atrocious conditions in Indiana prisons during the pandemic, outlawing the shackling of people giving birth, or building programs to provide women undergoing reentry with job skills and housing.

As ours is at heart a research initiative, I also want to emphasize that connecting individual experience to historical contexts has served the purpose of writing innovative history: the Iwphp scholars present a critique of the "women's prison" at its very foundation, as their work reveals the gendered violence and economic exploitation that have characterized such institutions from the beginning.

Daniel Jones: As a result of our work in the Iwphp, we offer a new terminology: that of the *embodied observer*, who views the archive from the position of the captive, from inside their

carceral experience. For example: as embodied observers, each one of us took seriously the allegations of sexual and gendered violence reported by the women and girls incarcerated at the Indiana Reformatory Institution for Women and Girls. No other scholar captured as significant the legislative investigations of the two prominent wealthy Quaker prison reformers who founded the reformatory. No other scholar recognized that the stories of those imprisoned women and girls are likely factual and needed to be told. We captured the voices and experiences of those women and girls—captives like us—to tell their stories alongside the prison reformer's stories to provide a more complex, nuanced, and accurate history of these spaces in this period. We threw into question current institutionalized narratives, such as the perspective that nineteenth-century Indiana women reformers were wholly selfless and benevolent.

As incarcerated scholars and thus embodied observers, we know the truth of the conditions of confinement, the realities of carceral trauma, and the gendered and sexual violence present in our personal prison experiences. All this, alongside the scholarship of women, race, and critical prison studies scholars informs our examination of the archive. When incarcerated scholars make the choice to privilege their experiences of incarceration as a lens to view the archive, we question the very authority of the dominant scholars who write about the jailers and the jailed, whether they can create an accurate and valid capture of history, knowledge, or experience.

Nelson: The question as to what counts as a historically valid claim has also been an interesting and, I think, productive source of tension in the Iwphp. During the origin stages of the project, the coordinators—my predecessor Kelsey Kauffman and I—focused on organizing the teaching of historical theory and methods inside the prison classroom, with the generous help of several volunteer instructors who taught the kinds of courses you would take as a first-year history graduate student. It was a formation in the academic way of doing things. Some students questioned this approach while also wielding it strategically. They asked why, to be taken seriously, their work needed to be delivered in the register and according to the particular epistemological standards of academic discourse. Nevertheless, they realized that being able to engage academics on their own terms was a way to gain a specific type of authority and to take part in important conversations. For my part, I and fellow Iwphp instructors such as Alex Tipei have reflected deeply (à la Michel Foucault) on the meanings of “discipline” and “disciplinarity”: recognizing the productive possibilities of disciplinary frameworks such as those of academic history, while considering to what extent we wished to play the role of “history cop.” Ultimately, the Iwphp scholars have embraced diversification of formats. In their academic work, each scholar has taken up different orientations to “the archive”; they have different opinions about the appropriateness of speculating beyond the available evidence, for example. Many have reframed their research for wider audiences through public-facing projects and creative works that aren't bound by the same rules as academic history.[7]

Daniel Jones: Exactly. Access and audience are critical elements of the method we have built. Because prisons are cordoned off, secretive spaces, the people in them are often forgotten or ignored. We knew that our work had to reach more than just academia. Choosing to funnel our research into additional projects is important to us so that more people could engage our work and experience this new understanding of incarceration. Our book features excerpts from the play I wrote with Anastazia Schmid, *The Duchess of Stringtown*, which brought new life to characters and key historical moments from our research through script and storytelling. Anastazia also wrote a play about Mary Schweitzer, one of the women in prison, and the unethical operations performed upon her by the prison doctor, Theophilus Parvin. We have made

a point to present our work to as many diverse groups as possible, engaging with feminists, historians, undergraduates, activists, researchers, and teachers. We're also hoping to widen academics' understanding of what is “legitimate” history. Converting traditionally trained historians who've been our faculty and program administrators to our cause and gaining their support required them to see research as art in academic spaces outside the prison. Our production of *The Duchess of Stringtown* before the National Council on Public History conference at the Iwphp shows that art and research work together to shift narratives and open opportunities. Our goal is to transcend traditional disciplinary and stylistic boundaries to share our research, methods, and knowledge with as many groups as possible because not only is the content of our work meaningful but so are the methods of our analysis and the empowerment afforded by the epistemic privilege we have given to our lived experiences.

Wilson: In our teaching spaces, we focus on collaborative learning, praxis, and critical thinking. We strongly believe that collaborative learning is preparation for democratic participation. Our pedagogy organizes our members to work in groups. Our work and structure amplify democratic values. Prisons are total institutions in which not everyone is allowed to learn, especially in group settings. Our work counters this authoritarianism. Our study groups are training grounds for participatory democracy. In what ways does your teaching contribute to democracy?

Berger: The vast majority of incarcerated people come from underresourced communities. Most have little to no college education. Offering classes in prison thus accounts for the failures of democratic inclusion for the working-class people of color who constitute most incarcerated people. Disconnected from efforts to democratize education and reduce the number of people in prison, democratic education in an antidemocratic institution that has come to define an undemocratic society.

Hylton: This teaching illuminates the farce that is U.S. democracy. It speaks to the oppressive nature of the systems in place that keep some populations silent while amplifying the voices of others. It addresses the disfranchisement of whole peoples and populations from democratic processes—before, during, and after their incarceration. It also speaks to the power that exists within relationships and of restorative practices that can supersede structures of hierarchical power.

Daniel Jones: The method emerging from the Indiana Women's Prison History Project is a corrective to epistemic injustice. Epistemic injustice, as Miranda Fricker and others have noted, is about devaluation of voice and personal knowledge of self and experiences in favor of institutions and administrative authorities who can speak louder and are considered “more official” than an individual. In the Black feminist tradition of self-definition and self-valuation, with this project and our approach to the archive, we epistemically privileged our right to be knowers; we privileged our right to use our background and history with the criminal legal system, especially the prison, to be one lens through which we viewed the archive. We supported this with an interdisciplinary reading of the secondary literature engaged for this project. We counter the devalued and underrepresented voice of incarcerated scholars, while demonstrating our own authority to speak and analyze the system that incarcerates us. As a Black woman, I counter the disqualification of Black women affected by incarceration, many of whom encounter systemic barriers to justice, equity, equality, education, and employment and argue that we deserve better.[8]

Besteman: I think our democracy, in the sense of electoral politics, is dead. It has been hijacked by white supremacy (nothing new), corporate power, and the machinations of political party

jockeying in ways that are completely divorced from what regular people want from their government. So, I will interpret this question in terms of democracy as an intentional and collaborative act of listening, community building, and mutual care. In this sense, democracy is about opening spaces for everyone to matter, feel valued, contribute to knowledge production, share a sense of community, and gain confidence to speak about their experiences and their wisdom to others who are different. The larger goal is, of course, overthrowing the current legal and carceral system to usher in better ways of ameliorating harm and ensuring accountability in the wake of harm. But we will only do that if system-impacted people are positioned to lead the way and others are willing to follow their lead. That, for me, is the point of community building through coteaching with inside educators and teaching in the Colby Across the Walls program, which I coordinate.

Wilson: Because prison is inherently oppressive, I believe that for education to be liberatory it must be delinked from the structures erected by the administration. The administration creates numerous barriers and restrictions to learning. Democratizing education inside would mean removing those barriers and restrictions, allowing more people to learn and grow. The public can push for more prison education programs or it can support imprisoned folx's efforts to create democratic learning spaces for growth and transformation. The first option will always be characterized by restrictiveness and scarcity. The second option is characterized by openness, collaboration, and transformative opportunities.

Wilson: Comment on the possibilities of democratizing education inside and the constraints on doing so.

Hylton: To democratize education or any other beneficial opportunity, there must be intentionality—a focus on people most marginalized, while accounting for intersectionality of oppressions. The people who refuse to set foot in the Education Department for fear of abuse or rejection must be recruited and supported from application to completion. The main constraints rest primarily on carceral culture. Staff and residents alike tend to operate according to the same hierarchy of crimes, and Lgbtq+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer plus) people are still ostracized somewhere near the level of sex offenders. Even if administrators and teachers chose to implement policies and practices to recruit and support people lower on the hierarchy of crimes, as well as Lgbtq+ people, there would need to be true collaboration with the resident population (especially those higher on the hierarchy of crimes and those who have high standing among both residents and staff) toward culture change to partner in the support of those most marginalized groups of people.

Nelson: It seems to me that higher education in prison uncoupled from the work of abolition is a red herring. While those of us affiliated with colleges and universities work to make education better and more accessible inside, I worry about such programs becoming too solidified, and interactions between prisons and universities too comfortable. We shouldn't take the prison for granted in our work. The elimination of the forces that hold prisons aloft would also do much to democratize education generally.

Daniel Jones: First, I agree that democratized education in a carceral setting would require a delinking from the Department of Corrections. In fact, education in a carceral setting should be administered, as it is everywhere else in the state, by the Department of Education (Doe). If educators were managing the delivery of education, incarcerated students could hope to experience some degree of improvement. Of course, I am not blind to the fact that Doe administrators could be just as biased, racist, and uninformed as anyone, but I would hope that

they could be brought around to understand that the needs of students outside are the needs of students inside and then work to create a truly thriving educational environment in prisons to facilitate incarcerated people, expanding their knowledge and personal capacities.

Second, the triangulation among prison wardens, universities, and central office departments of corrections is historically and pragmatically problematic because incarcerated people are not considered, consulted, or involved in any aspect of the planning and delivery of Higher Education in Prison programming. We are not represented in the partnerships nor deemed worthy resources in the planning and delivery, and we therefore struggle CONSTANTLY trying to navigate programs that are not student-centered, meaning there is often little to no consideration for transferability of credits to other institutions, no education on how Pell grants are administered, no plan for credential completion upon release or transfer to another facility, no consideration of reentry supports to students upon release, no consideration of degree offerings reflective of the job market, and no consideration of the impact of collateral consequences of criminal convictions and the attainment of professional licensure or certifications, to name just a few of the ongoing issues.

Third, there is the need to elevate all actors' consciousness regarding the pitfalls that facilitate the hyperincarceration of men, women, and children, mostly Black and brown, in America's prisons. I feel that most of the people delivering educational programming to people in prison are woefully uneducated about how race, sex, class, and gender intersect with criminality to funnel millions into prisons. Some degree of education and training should be mandatory for such people prior to teaching inside a prison. These educators create the syllabi, choose the texts, and create the projects that we learn. True liberation is facilitated by pedagogical choices on the information that is disseminated and shared. The educator's capacity for teaching and facilitating a path to liberation is equally critical. Otherwise, we can never get to a cocreative learning environment of liberatory experiences as long as the educators coming into the prison believe themselves to be saviors of the unfortunate or simply have no clue what is really going on.

Berger: The constraints are ubiquitous and inescapable. Guards determine who and what materials are allowed in and control the basis of communication. I do not believe that education can truly be democratic in inherently oppressive institutions. However, study, both in terms of formal higher education in prison and the self-organized learning that incarcerated people do themselves, provide vital opportunities to engage a wide set of ideas. Learning to share, discuss, debate, and apply ideas is a key ingredient of democracy, and one that incarcerated people practice more widely, and creatively, than is often acknowledged.

Besteman: One possible path toward classroom democratization is ensuring that inside students have equitable opportunities for engagement and participation in classes. That is the minimum an outside educator should be doing. I'm particularly interested in how educational programs can democratize community involvement more broadly for people inside beyond the classroom. An example is working to ensure that college classes for incarcerated people lead to other opportunities, such as master's degree and Ph.D. programs or the ability to accept paying jobs while incarcerated with organizations outside prison. Opening teaching and staff positions at outside colleges and universities to people inside who have earned the appropriate credentials and degrees must happen. Community classes taught by incarcerated teachers/facilitators to outside groups is another possibility. Many of these possibilities are only imaginable because of the use of Zoom during the COVID-19 pandemic, which opened the door to new forms of communicating over the walls.

Wilson: How has recent scholarly literature on the history of the carceral state and imprisonment influenced the teaching of American history within prisons?

Berger: This is a difficult question to answer, and I expect it changes based on geography and facility. A number of incarcerated people are reading and commenting on the scholarly literature, and a growing number of scholars are listening to and learning from (and with) incarcerated people, both historically through archival records and in real time through correspondence. The interactions between scholars and incarcerated people, and the steps formerly incarcerated people are taking toward becoming scholars is essential. Such exchanges are getting us closer to a full understanding of what incarceration means and its connection to other aspects of the social world. Here, I think it is important to acknowledge the work of the Indiana Women's Prison History Project and the community storytelling efforts such as the Prison Public Memory Project and the Rikers Public Memory Project, alongside formal scholarship.[9]

Hylton: This recent scholarship has supported a more open sharing of the bloody, horrific truths upon which this country was built. The widespread sharing of this history seems to be making a difference in the willingness of educators, staff, and residents to engage in truth telling about the lies that have been institutionalized in the foundational systems upon which the United States operates.

Wilson: Within prison, whenever American history is taught via official channels, policing and prisons are never mentioned. They are not a part of American history. Relying upon official educational spaces to teach one about prisons and their role in American history is futile. It won't happen. Imprisoned folx have had to rely upon their families, friends, and supporters to learn about the role of policing and prisons in American history. Today, more books and essays are written about these topics. They are the most contested and censored materials behind the walls. The Doc doesn't want imprisoned folx to learn this part of American history. So, these materials, whether books, essays, or ‘zines, must be taught surreptitiously.

These materials provide a firm grounding from which imprisoned folx can critique and challenge the prison-industrial complex. Inside activists and organizers have been emboldened by this literature. It has created a common language for them to speak with.

Wilson: How has recent scholarly literature on the history of the carceral state and imprisonment influenced the teaching of American history within prisons?

Nelson: The Iwphp began as a project to research the history of the Indiana Women's Prison, which opened in 1873 as the first state-run prison designated for women. Thus, the work has always centered the prison; the students began with archival sources and then worked outward to place their research in conversation with scholarship. The Iwphp scholars read widely not only in the field of carceral studies but also in labor history, gender and sexuality studies, Indiana history, histories of religion and philanthropy, and much more. Much of this work happened in the years before I joined the project, so Michelle can say more. I will mention that when Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives* appeared in 2019, I remember pressing a copy evangelically into each student's hand. That book perhaps more than any other mirrors the ethos of their work, not only in its efforts to read “the archive” differently to capture something of the intimate lives of marginalized and often-criminalized women around the turn of the twentieth century but also because the Iwphp itself is something of a “beautiful experiment” in its innovation, audacity, and risk.[10]

Daniel Jones: As the history project completed its first semester, it was evident that several things were true. There was great interest in what we were learning and sharing in our meta-discussion for different reasons. We'd only scratched the surface of the materials we were reviewing. There was no way that, in one semester, we could bring all our findings together. We needed more time and additional support. To assist us, our program coordinator, Kelsey Kauffman, brought in postdoctoral students to help with the editing and preparing for our first conference. We were also permitted additional group study hall time to review our primary-source data and work together. Most classes were offered to expand our understanding of the secondary research, such as Crime and Punishment, Introduction to Historical Scholarship, Colloquium in U.S. History, Race and Sexuality, Ethnic Studies, and Screenwriting and Film. A Visiting Scholars Symposium allowed us to hear directly from Marlon Bailey, Elizabeth Hinton, Pippa Holloway, Khalil Gibran Muhammad, Marcus Rediker, Lorna Rhodes, Dylan Rodriguez, Micol Seigel, Caleb Smith, Andrea Smith, Heather Ann Thompson, and others as we studied their work, while a number of professors and graduate students from around Indiana offered courses and other forms of instruction in person: Kelsey Kauffman, who was instrumental in creating the Iwphp, Micol Seigel once again, as well as Charlene Fletcher Brown, Eliza Brown, Emmalon Davis, Monica Deck, John Dittmer, Meg Galasso, Peper Langhout, Alex Lichtenstein, Sharon Maes, Lesley Neff, Elizabeth Nelson, Ougie Pak, Robert Schneider, Eric Sandweiss, and Alex Tipei. These courses offered a continuity of experiences that fed directly into our reading of the archive and the development of the method we used in writing our book.

Wilson: Whenever American, i.e., U.S., history is taught behind the walls through official channels, policing and prisons are never mentioned. So incarcerated folx rely upon family, friends, and supporters to learn this history, to learn the roles policing and prisons have played throughout this country's history. This material is also the most censored and contested material behind the walls. Often, they are obtained and studied surreptitiously. Why is the teaching of U.S. history behind the walls such a fraught topic?

Besteman: The American history I teach behind the walls and with Leo, who lives behind the walls, is the history of white supremacy, racial capitalism, and militarism that has produced the state of hyperincarceration in which we currently live. The challenge is to match the story with the parallel story of constant resistance and rebellion in a way that resonates with students as a potential path forward. Our carceral history is so dire that learning about it can debilitate, which is a dangerous mind-set inside. Rather, learning about the history of carcerality can be a liberatory process of understanding how the system has grown to ensnare ever larger numbers of people, and to envision alternative paths to address and ameliorate harm. Being able to envision alternatives that could exist in Maine is empowering, as such visions give us all a sense of the collective, collaborative work ahead. Another reason it is fraught, of course, is that it questions the entire basis of the contemporary criminal legal system and its expression in incarceration.

Wilson: Every teaching space is different, but one lesson I found applicable everywhere comes directly from Paulo Freire's work. To be a good teacher, one must be willing to be a great student. One must be willing to be a teacher-student. When I began the study groups, I was in a facility where I had strong relationships and connections. I knew the people. When I was transferred to another facility, I didn't know the people and couldn't count on my connections and relationships to help me. I knew what I wanted to convey to people, but I wasn't familiar with their condition, priorities, or current efforts.[11]

I became a noticer. I was willing to learn, to listen. Instead of focusing on what I wanted to teach, I focused on what the people could teach me about themselves, their histories, and their concerns. I learned a lot during that period, and it made me a better organizer and facilitator. Becoming a student made me a better teacher.

When I was transferred from that facility, I took this lesson with me, and it made the work easier at my current facility. Becoming a student first will make one a stronger, better, and wiser teacher.

Wilson: What lessons about teaching have you learned that are applicable to all teaching, whether in traditional locations such as classrooms or in other alternative spaces?

Nelson: The Iwphp invigorated my understanding of the power of teaching and learning in the humanities—history, in particular. I joined the project in January 2018 an underemployed (adjunct) professor with a Ph.D. in French history and an attraction to seemingly esoteric subjects such as nineteenth-century Parisian mental asylums. At that time, I struggled to convey the importance of historical inquiry in practical terms (and I still believe interestingness should be enough of a justification for the pursuit of knowledge). Yet when first I entered the prison classroom, I found a group of students who were passionate about the liberatory potential of the work. For them, there were real personal and political stakes to doing history, and to echo Stevie's words, by listening to my students I learned an incredible amount. My sense of how history could be *wielded* grew, and my sense of what is marginal or peripheral changed. In fall 2018 I joined the Medical Humanities Program at Indiana University–Purdue University, Indianapolis, and there I've taught history courses on medical racism, mental health care, disability rights, and more: topics that are absolutely central to politics and the experience of everyday life but that would have seemed marginal to students (and even to me) before my work with the Iwphp shifted my understanding of what is important. Of course, the events of the past few years have made that less of an uphill battle.

Daniel Jones: The faculty working with us on the history project and in the higher education program in general were people who, for the most part, were interested in providing students with access to resources and opportunities so that we might develop as scholars and use our findings, insight, and perspectives to progress the field and progress as scholars in the field. However, the degree of vetting for faculty members offering higher education programming wasn't always thorough. A few faculty members were more interested in ways working with us might be a conduit for their career progression. These circumstances created feelings of being researched and used and needing to be "loyal" to a faculty member to remain in the group with continued access. While this was not my personal experience, I unquestionably observed more than one transactional relationship between a faculty member and a student, which temporarily put the entire higher education program in jeopardy.

The power dynamic between incarcerated students and faculty members, where the goal is equality in experience, especially among adult learners, is a laudable goal, and when it is achieved, it is an exuberant experience. The reality can be far less than equal. Part of this inequality is based on faculty members' and program administrators' perceptions of incarcerated people and deciding they are unworthy of being treated as whole human beings. The taint of criminality can pervert student interactions. A transparent, multifaceted vetting process of faculty and program administrators designed to identify a history of transactional behavior is one way to limit transactional-oriented faculty and program administrators from tainting programming in prisons.

Wilson: What is distinctive about your teaching of American history?

Berger: I teach history in the framework of social history and usable pasts. By social history, I mean an emphasis on the way ordinary people inhabit, experience, create, and respond to larger political, economic, and cultural forces. Sometimes that means a focus on the quotidian. Always it means that individual people contain within them the world: a story or a vignette from a particular person, even or especially people who are not well known, can reveal something about what it means to live through a certain moment in history. By usable past, I mean history that is not predictive but instructive. More than what happened, history is an argument about why it happened and why our present is the way it is. I teach history with an understanding that most students are thinking more about the present and future but that the only way to understand either of those is through the past.

Hylton: In teaching U.S. history through the lens of anthropology with a focus on carcerality, while living within a carceral setting, I think the most distinctive aspect of my teaching is that I can speak directly to the lived experience of how that history is experienced in today's prison system. In partnership with Catherine, we are intentional about utilizing my lived experience to provide real-time examples of the impacts described in the literature, research, and other sources.

Besteman: Anthropology as a discipline has been deeply complicit in imperialism, racism, colonialism, sexism, and other forms of oppression. Our discipline has been reckoning with this for decades. This reckoning shows up in the classroom in various ways, and although I think this is the norm for how anthropologists teach U.S. history, my approach certainly centers this history and its importance for how we consider, analyze, and interpret the present. Leo's pedagogy of relevance demands of students their attention to how this history affects their lives and futures. We focus on U.S. history as partly the history of carcerality rooted in enslavement; Black Codes; colonial ventures abroad; and laws enacted to control immigrants, poor white men, workers, and political dissent; and then we ask our students how this history matters in their lives. Requiring that our students project their understanding of U.S. history onto how they move and act in the world now and in the future is, if not distinctive, critical to our approach.

Wilson: What sources, questions, and analytical approaches do you emphasize?

Berger: History is about conjuncture and contingency. Conjuncture because things happen only out of the convergence and interaction of different (social, cultural, political, economic, geographic) forces. Contingency because none of these interactions or events are predetermined. When teaching about prison, it's important for me to denaturalize the terms of engagement by asking students to reflect on common linguistic practices (including *inmate*, *felon*). I ask them to reflect on what those terms mean or create for them, and what happens when we replace such terms with human-centered language, such as *currently incarcerated people* or *formerly incarcerated people*. I ask my classes to hold ourselves to such human-centered language even while recognizing that many of our source materials, including some writings by incarcerated people, does not.

In addition to the scholarly readings (across several disciplines, I should note), I also utilize reports from groups such as the Prison Policy Initiative, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the Sentencing Project; journalistic articles from news organizations such as the Appeal, Truthout, or the Marshall Project; and writings by currently or formerly incarcerated people. This range of sources allows students to interact with relevant recent happenings and first-person testimonials about things that connect to histories and policies we are reading about. Where

possible, I bring in digital sources, including the Washington Prison History Project, which I coordinate. It's important to me that students engage how knowledge is both produced (across disciplines and experiences) and disseminated (across genre and format). Most especially, I think it is vital that students recognize incarcerated people as policy experts on matters of incarceration and social policy. People are often open to the expertise of experience. Incarcerated people can speak to prison conditions better than anyone. But in addition, I think we must reckon with the fact that many incarcerated people are also experts at the law and alternatives to the status quo, not just regarding incarceration but also about the range of institutional failures that sustain the carceral systems.[12]

Hylton: In crafting the course syllabus, Catherine and I were intentional about emphasizing the voices of those who have been overlooked or dismissed in the writing of history. The people who lived through and were directly affected. The people who are working to change the painful realities rather than merely recounting the sufferings.

The resources were multimedia, including full ethnographies, scholarly articles, videos, documentaries, abolitionist tool kits, and news articles. We included music, poetry, and mindful reflections on the impact of the materials on our personal, professional, and academic lives. My favorite question in teaching is “So What?,” which I learned from Robert Bernheim, who was teaching a course on the Holocaust at the time (and who also taught the transformative/restorative justice course I mentioned). So, we've spent this time learning about and discussing a certain subject—so what? What does that mean to you? How does that affect your life and the way you see the world? How does this learning translate into your personal, professional, or academic life? I love that Catherine has dubbed this my pedagogy of relevance! What excites me most about teaching is helping young people reimagine the purposes of higher education—getting away from the performative and conformative aspects of the classroom and leaning into the unique power and wisdom that exists within each member of our colearning community. Rather than pushing students to regurgitate what they have learned and show us how they have retained the materials we provided, I care most about facilitating the spark of excitement and curiosity about a particular avenue or set of avenues that students genuinely want to explore; encouraging them in seeking their own materials (and creating their own materials to inform those who come after them); and discovering how this process of learning can contribute to their lives, to the lives of those directly connected to them, and to the lives of people that have yet to meet.

Besteman: In terms of sources, we take a multimedia approach, incorporating mainstream academic texts, op-eds, abolitionist tool kits and essays alongside podcasts, films, and music. Many of our sources are included in the Abolitionist Resource List on the *Freedom & Captivity* Web site. For questions, we employ Leo's pedagogy of relevance, referenced above. Our analytical approach is based in abolitionist praxis. Knowing our history, as noted above, requires action in the present to create a better future. What is your pathway? That's the question we hope our students live with for the rest of their lives.[13]

Footnotes

1. For Leo Hylton's lunch talk, see "Lunch with Leo Hylton," Oct. 27, 2021, *Freedom & Captivity*, https://www.freedomandcaptivity.org/lunch-with-leo-hylton/.
2. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (Boston, 1845), 3.
3. For the highest grade-level breakdown of the Maine adult facility population as of December 2022, see "Maine Department of Corrections Adult Data Report," Dec. 2022, *Maine Department of Corrections*, https://www.maine.gov/corrections/sites/maine.gov.corrections/files/inline-files/December%202022%20Monthly%20Adult%20Data%20Report_0.pdf.
4. Martin Sostre (1923–2015) was a prison activist, organizer, and legendary jailhouse lawyer who almost singlehandedly secured prisoners' rights to revolutionary literature, non-Christian religious materials, and due process during disciplinary hearings. See Alexandria Symonds, "Overlooked No More: Martin Sostre, Who Reformed America's Prisons from His Cell," *New York Times*, April 24, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/24/obituaries/martin-sostre-overlooked.html. Dan Berger, *Captive Nation: Black Prison Organizing in the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill, 2014).
5. Walter Rodney (1942–1980) was an internationally acclaimed scholar and author. For examples of his work, see Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972; London, 2018); and Walter Rodney, *The Groundings with My Brothers* (1969; London, 2019). See also C. L. R. James, *Walter Rodney and the Question of Power* (London, 1983).
6. On the Angola 3, see Albert Woodfox, *Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement. My Story of Transformation and Hope* (New York, 2019); and Holly Genovese, "The Only Panthers Left: An Intellectual History of the Angola 3," 2019, *Bernard and Audre Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice*, https://law.utexas.edu/humanrights/projects/the-only-panthers-left-an-intellectual-history-of-the-angola-3/. Russell "Maroon" Shoatz (1943–2021) was a New Afrikan political prisoner, author, activist, and organizer. He was a founding member of the Black Unity Council and a former Black Panther. See Ashley Lucas, "The End of Rage: A Black Panther in Prison Makes a Reckoning. The Story of Russell Maroon Shoatz," *Plough*, Sept. 14, 2021, https://www.plough.com/en/topics/justice/social-justice/criminal-justice/the-end-of-rage.
7. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York, 1972). Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1978).
8. Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowledge* (New York, 2007).
9. On the Prison Public Memory Project, see https://www.prisonpublicmemory.org/. On the Rikers Public Memory Project, see https://rikersmemoryproject.org/. For an attempt to gather current scholarship, see Dan Berger, et al., "Prison Abolition Syllabus 2.0," *Black Perspectives*, Sept. 8, 2018, https://www.aaihs.org/prison-abolition-syllabus-2-0/.
10. Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (New York, 2019).
11. On Paulo Freire and his work, see "Paulo Freire: Pedagogy of Hope," *Great Pedagogical Thinkers*, https://www.pedagogy4change.org/paulo-freire-pedagogy-of-hope/.
12. The Prison Policy Initiative produces reports that I use. For examples, see Wendy Sawyer and Peter Wagner, "Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2022," March 14, 2022, *Prison Policy Initiative*, https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2022.html; and Peter Wagner and Bernadette

Rabuy, "Following the Money of Mass Incarceration," Jan. 25, 2017, *ibid*., https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/money.html. State profiles on the site also provide useful analytics on the dynamics of what is overwhelmingly a local mass incarceration problem. See "Discover Your State," n.d., *ibid*., https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/. I also use state and national data from the Sentencing Project. See "Detailed Data Tool," n.d., *Sentencing Project*, https://www.sentencingproject.org/research/detailed-state-data-tool/; and Christopher Uggen et al., "Locked Out 2022: Estimates of People Denied Voting Rights," Oct. 25, 2022, *ibid*., https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/locked-out-2022-estimates-of-people-denied-voting-rights/. The Washington American Civil Liberties Union released a valuable report on debt criminalization and incarceration through legal financial obligations. See "Modern Day Debtors' Prisons," n.d., *Aclu Washington*, https://aclu-wa.org/debtors-prison. The organization also recently released a report on prison labor. See "Captive Labor: Exploitation of Incarcerated Workers," June 15, 2022, *ibid*., https://www.aclu.org/news/human-rights/captive-labor-exploitation-of-incarcerated-workers.
13. "Abolitionist Resource List," Aug. 2022, *Freedom & Captivity*, https://www.freedomandcaptivity.org/category/background/.