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## *Caught Somewhere Between...*

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**Radical Departures: Ruminations on the Purposes of Higher Education in Prison**

### **Abstract**

*In this paper I emphasize the intersection of incarceration and higher education, and its effects on identity. I focus specifically on my experience as a black man pursuing higher education while incarcerated, and how education impacts the ways in which I see the worlds that I inhabit as a black man and as a black prisoner. I explore how philosophy and fictionalized writings have contributed to the transformative experience that education constitutes for me, and I use the oppositional positioning of love and hate as the lens through which I premise my observations.*



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Question: What does it mean to learn in prison?

Answer: Love and hate.

## **Introduction**

Conversations about higher education in prison should begin with some understanding of the actual lived experience of being in prison. Prison education has the potential to be life changing, but it presents particular challenges for the incarcerated. There is a common theme among some prisoners which states: though my body is incarcerated, my mind is free. I held that sentiment myself until I came to recognize that freedom is not so easily gained. The idea of freedom, what it means to be free, is complicated by experience. I am not free simply because I believe that I am. Experiences are contextualized events and ideas that determine the way that thoughts are constructed and catalogued. The experience of these contextualized events creates a dilemma for the prisoner by way of a gained sense of awareness of the responsibility to oneself and the constraints of being unfree. I refuse to create in myself, or promote in others, the idea that learning in prison sets me free without acknowledging the extent to which being educated in prison also helps me understand the extent to which I am unfree. Prison is an inherently unfree place and this un-freedom has a permanence that is often overlooked. Being imprisoned is a type of trauma that begins upon capture. For example, if life consisted of one long chain of experiences signified by individual links, individual traumas would normally appear sporadically throughout the chain. In prison, life would be a chain comprised of one trauma broken into a long succession of individual experiences. For me, understanding the trauma of incarceration begins with being conscious of and then critically analyzing my circumstances.

Consciousness about the reality of incarceration is essential for any understanding about prison or oneself as a prisoner. Higher education can be consciousness raising, and consciousness *in* prison is consciousness *of* prison, and *all* of its attendant injustices. Learning in prison is a very distinctive experience because prison is an inherently hostile and stressful environment where scholarship is sometimes hindered by policy or practice. What it means to learn in prison is to be constantly engaged in an interrogation of the spaces you occupy, an interrogation that has a complicated relationship to freedom. Education in prison compels prisoners to question the ways that our surroundings impact how we are situated in relation to freedom. This examination necessarily involves questioning your own identity, which is informed by the very structure that confines you; I do not know if any other space disturbs identity and consciousness the way that prison disturbs its captives. I am being held captive against my will. This simple and obvious fact has immense consequences that are often overlooked because of questions about guilt or innocence, punishment and retribution. Because of my captivity, my consciousness is constantly assaulted by my concrete and steel surroundings, the constant surveillance, and the suppression of my individuality. Approximately, what it means is that in your every experience in prison, you are caught somewhere between love and hate.

An avid reader since 4th grade, I have always loved learning. That love has never left me, even as I have hated being incarcerated since my first moments in prison. Higher education in prison represents a difficult paradox within which I struggle to survive. I love being a part of and contributing to intellectual conversations that foster growth. I love the community that supports that positive self-concept that I strive to maintain despite the institutionalized indignities that I endure. People are paid to watch me undress and inspect my naked body. One's dignity could be

threatened under such conditions. But my dignity is sustained, in part, by higher education and the relationships I have cultivated.

## **Love and Hate**

I cannot escape the narrative attendant to my prisoner status, I am a prisoner; but in the classroom, I am part of a special community that is dedicated to learning. My fellow student-prisoners, professors from Wesleyan University, Trinity College, Middlesex Community College, Harvard University, and Yale University, students from Wesleyan, and other distinguished guests come into Cheshire Correctional Institution and help create that special community. It is special to be within this harsh prison environment and be able to experience, even momentarily, some semblance of normalcy. There is also a positive culture within that community that is entirely different from the culture in general population. In the classroom space ideas are shared and debated, intellectual growth is fostered, and friendships can transcend prison and the normal prison routine of separation. I am reminded of the lack of meaningful interactions outside of the classroom most powerfully when I am in that space. This lack has ontological implications for me that I struggle to put into words; that is, loss and pain are merely words whereas what I feel, the consequences of what I feel, go beyond words. My education has reminded me that I am living in a space that is inhumane. Once I leave the singular space of the classroom, I am subjected to intensive surveillance and random stop and frisk searches as I navigate the walkways. In the housing units I am further separated from any sense of a college community as my fellow students and I are randomly housed throughout the prison.

Prison prevents me, as a student, from escaping my status as a prisoner. One I love, the other I hate; but without the hate, there would be no opportunity for love. My access to higher education is a consequence of my incarceration. Learning in prison brings such realities to light as I become increasingly aware of the effects that my imprisonment has on my consciousness. In one sense, the ability to recognize the myriad injustices attendant to such circumstances is empowering; simultaneously, the seeming impossibility of changing my circumstances can be incredibly disempowering. As a student-prisoner, I exist within this state of conflicting realities. As a student in Wesleyan University's Center for Prison Education program (CPE), my identity is found somewhere within the liminal space that separates the student and the prisoner, and is shaped by the prison itself, where I exist within the chasm between love and hate.

I struggle with the fact that I am grateful for the opportunity to gain an education because that opportunity is inextricably linked to my incarceration. I love going to school and learning about new ways to dissect and construct ideas and arguments. I love writing and learning how to be a better writer. Since I love my education and my education is a result of my being incarcerated, then the logical conclusion could be that I love my imprisonment. But that is not a conclusion I can accept. Prison is a depressive environment that can stifle intellectual curiosity and challenge cognitive functioning (Bryant, Davis, Heywood, Meikle, & Peirce, 2008). I am a Wesleyan student because I did not let prison suppress my intellectual curiosity and I have always engaged my mind through reading and intellectually stimulating conversation. I can appreciate the tremendous opportunity afforded me, but such an opportunity is suggestive of some missed opportunity prior to my incarceration. My incarceration is deeply personal, but it is also emblematic of some larger system; I am merely one of the many confined persons whose mind has been elevated through higher education. My education has allowed me to identify the structural implications of my present condition as a prisoner of the state. I love being a student,

but I hate being a prisoner. From one moment to the next I wrestle with the fact that my identity is bound to both.

### **The Construction of Identity**

Upon my arrest, it was the state of Connecticut that I was pitted against, but from birth it has always seemed as if it was the United States of America vs. ME. This is the lived reality not only for prisoners but also other black and brown peoples. The fact that mass incarceration is fueled by racism and socio-economic inequality across a wide range of foci presents another obstruction that while difficult to adequately quantify, numerous statistics show strong correlations (e.g., Alexander, 2012; ). Identifying such problems is extremely important to be able to overcome them, but also challenging because simply knowing may feel like a burden at times, which can affect the construction of identity. What is known cannot be unknown, and so I can find myself loving the absence of ignorance and hating myself for feeling even a moment of powerlessness in the face of such barriers.

The struggle is with the history of slavery and racism, and the present-day realities of mass incarceration and racism in the U.S. My experiences as a black male are deeply personal and tied to a collective identity of blackness that has been crafted by others. Socially and culturally proscribed conceptions of blackness limit my options in the construction of identity. Certain habits or traits can feel like they threaten exclusion from this collective identity and can act as barriers to the full exploration of what is possible. I always remember how I would never listen to certain types of music simply because it seemed undeniably improper to me. Because I never questioned my attitude, I did not realize that such decisions were arbitrarily made based on an adherence to social norms. I limited myself in many ways because I did not engage in critical assessments of my own decisions. I was inadvertently playing into cultural stigmas which aided in denying some measure of uniqueness that I possessed because personal identity is linked to traits that distinguish you from others (Goffman, 1963). Over time, I have gained the confidence to exert self-determination as a black man without thought to cultural norms, and this extends to my status as a black-student-prisoner.

My identity as a student-prisoner is further complicated by the fact that I am a Black-student-prisoner who has always been in a love/hate relationship with the Black and white worlds that I inhabit. I have loved my Black skin and all that it represents ever since I first learned to love my Black skin and all that it represents; but I have always hated the social forces that have tried to dissuade me of that love. I am constantly in a state of existentialist questioning because of the white response to the presence of melanin in my skin. Who am I? Are my experiences authentic or are they the consequences of misperceptions of others or myself? Because of the history of racism in the U.S., being black is to feel the air around you shift when you enter certain spaces; it is to know that equality is forever a few steps away and fairness here or there depending on the day. To be Black is to know that something is wrong in the world while white people act as if they do not know this; it is to feel that at times, the whole world is against you. To be a prisoner is to be reminded of these things; to be a Black prisoner is to feel all of these things acutely.

Understanding how being black, being a student, *and* being a prisoner coalesce and constitute my identity is integral for me to be able to achieve peace within myself and it is through participation in higher education that this understanding and peace is achieved. My

identity as a student is claimed and achieved through my own efforts in a way that being Black and a prisoner are not. Because my identity is inextricably linked to these three words, Black-student-prisoner, these three realities, I am threatened by a constant state of contention with and within myself. This contention is centered round love and hate.

It was not until I became a Black-student-prisoner that I was able to articulate my reality as a Black male in America in a way that could make it difficult for my reality to be ignored by others. I say *could* because I am also a prisoner, and as such, my voice may be ignored. Black and brown bodies have been subjected to incarceration, in some form, since slavery (Davis, 2003); yet, our lived experiences behind bars is still a mystery for those who have never been in prison and for those of us here, in that we may never know the full extent of “side effects” resulting from our imprisonment. This is my lived reality where I have often felt like K., the protagonist in Franz Kafka’s *The Trial*, who went about his life while being under arrest. His every movement after being informed of his arrest was taken on uncertain terms. K. could get no explanation about the reason for his arrest, from anyone, and went to his death uncertainly (Kafka, 1925). As a Black man, my voice could be ignored if I was not incarcerated. My incarceration only increases the difficulties I face in trying to have my voice heard. I am trapped within this paradox where prison presents opportunity, even if that opportunity is produced by a misperception. Dominant narratives concerning prisoners have been primarily constructed far from the flesh and blood of life inside prison. Misperceptions abound, but curiosity about prisoners, and genuine interest concerning our experiences, create opportunities for us to be heard. I came to prison expecting to fight on a regular basis. Years later, I am a college student and a writer. What I am speaking of here is the fact that my incarceration presented me with the first real opportunity for my voice to be heard beyond my immediate environment. Malcom X, George Jackson, Nelson Mandela, Angela Davis, and Jack Abbot are voices that may not have been heard, or heard by so many, without their incarceration. While a number of prisoners have written on the subject any search for writings on prison and prisoners will be dominated by university scholars and academics. As a black man, my chances of being heard in prison are far greater than I had back then because I was not aware of many things outside of my life in the streets. I lacked consciousness about so many things. Recognizing this has the potential to be disempowering because without being imprisoned, I may have been totally consumed by capitalist ideologies that value money and power over love for others. As a black-student-prisoner I am sensitive to any form of disempowerment. I became conscious of how prison systematically reinforces the negative interactions between prisoners and authority figures, and one another, through social isolation and oppositional positioning (the practice of placing prisoners in positions where they must compete for limited resources).

As a black male I have had to contend with the false idea of white superiority my whole life and have always rejected any notion of inferiority that anyone has ever tried to confer upon me. Maintaining a positive sense of self is made difficult when the world that you inhabit has negative perceptions concerning your race and identity. Through my education, I have been able to participate in the deconstruction of this mistaken reality we all find ourselves living, which is centered around the racism of the past (Alexander, 2010). The most difficult aspect of such a momentous project is that those of us doing the work must not forget that the mistaken reality we are attempting to deconstruct is real, and represents a legitimate obstruction to broad socio-economic change in society. Despite the incredible challenges, I love the idea that I can contribute to changing negative perceptions and the ways people relate to and interact with one

another. Yet, even this love is accompanied by hate because of the tremendous obstacles that historically entrenched attitudes concerning what race, gender, and class represent.

As a prisoner, I immediately pushed back against the idea of belonging to a collective identity, but this identity is imposed upon all prisoners through policy, practice, and public perception. The prison uniform that I wear acts as subliminal messaging that programs you to see yourself as simply one of many. Prison schedules, and norms, entice you to think and move in accordance to rules and regulations, but also to move with the crowd. Such attacks on individuality can have deep psychological and emotional repercussions resulting in anti-social behaviors that make successful reintegration into society more difficult. Moreover, many in society hold biases against prisoners or convicted felons. As a student of higher education, I am being trained to question all that I encounter, including the ways in which I am judged. I am also being trained to think about the answers to these questions, which is a form of empowerment necessary to overcome the pressures of being so situated in collective identities. My identity as a black-student-prisoner acts as a constant reminder of the past, even as I am engaged in the work of making a better future for myself and others.

### **New Conceptions of Scholarship in Prison**

I continually find new conceptions of myself through pursuit of higher education. My identity is ever expanding as I gain a better understanding of where I fit within the framework of history and society. I realize that I am writing history with every decision I make or fail to make, and that my place in society is not so much fixed according to history but by the role I play in shaping society. I did not make such connections in the past, where I seldom looked towards the future. Now I understand that to find balance with the past, and in the future, is how I define purpose in the present.

DuBois's (1903) theory of double-consciousness was key for me to be able to reconcile what I felt about myself and what I thought about how the world viewed me. I felt like a child of emancipation as I gained a greater consciousness and moved towards self-realization; my "journey" led me to prison where I had leisure for self-reflection and self-examination (DuBois). I was able to find comfort and composure within that space between love and hate. In *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls (1971) introduced a way to create a system of justice that would be fair and impartial in an ideal world, which provides a starting point for conceiving a system of justice in our non-ideal world. Moving away from the existing social contract, Rawls proposed starting from an original position to determine how claims against individuals would be handled. Starting with a veil of ignorance to ensure impartiality, Rawls' theory begins with good intentions. Even if the veil of ignorance that Rawls used is unattainable as the starting point for conceptualizing his theory of justice made me aware that a white man, who may have been biased, made an attempt to account for such biases in considering justice as opposed to integrating such biases into his *Theory of Justice* (Rawls, 1971). Rawls also made me aware of how difficult justice is to obtain without recognizing and acknowledging the prejudices and biases that exist in society, and accounting for them in whatever system of justice you choose to devise.

Charles Mills' *The Racial Contract* (1997) was instrumental in my growing understanding of the ways in which institutions and other powerful entities incorporate their values into existing social structures, such as the way that white-supremacy crafted Jim Crow laws and policies whose effects are still felt today. Racism is no accident, and neither are the vast

inequities that exist between whites and non-whites (Mills, 1997). The idea that inequalities are a result of the choices made by individuals is nonsensical. That line of reasoning is affixed to the superiority/inferiority narrative created by racism and white supremacy. As a black-student-prisoner, I am able to discern the truths of institutional racism and nepotism, not from personal skepticism but through looking at history, laws, policies and practices. Mills let me know that many of my instincts concerning the institutionalization of racism throughout history were right, and that some of the concerns that I had about inclusion and exclusion in Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1971) were correct. This gave me confidence in myself in a way that I had not had previously. Higher education fuels a sense of self-awareness that is incredibly difficult to convey in any context, but it is especially difficult to convey its meaning for me as a black-student-prisoner.

Confidence is important because as an African American in the U.S., any claims I make about race are going to be controversial. Right or wrong plays less of a role in conversations about race because a conversation predicated on justice, respect, and equality would naturally include responsibility. Responsibility is too close to culpability for some people, so conversations about race are set in different frames of reference that are inherently geared toward neutrality where blame is avoided at all costs, and guilt is held at bay or irrationality masked as reason. I know that in order to face such a controversial topic I must be ready for my claims to be challenged, and willing to stand by my convictions, but also to listen and learn from others. Second, I must be willing to face the consequences of speaking the truth when some may not be willing to hear and willing to exert pressure to engender my silence. Finally, I must be confident enough to raise my voice and speak out. Absent confidence in your ideas, words go left unsaid. As a black-prisoner I am now familiar with academia, but academia is still not familiar with black-prisoners like me. However, I am confident that educated prisoners like myself will change this relationship. I have gained this confidence in my ideas through access to higher education.

### **On Philosophy**

Philosophy, in particular, has been incredibly useful in reconciling my evolving identity. I had always thought of philosophers as old white men who knew or cared nothing about my experiences as a black male born in the twentieth century. My education has allowed me to appreciate the value of philosophy in conceptualizing ideas about race, class, freedom, and in raising questions about my life. Questions of justice, existence, language, ethics, and experience are central to my quest for understanding myself. Lisa Guenther's (2013, 2014) works on solitary confinement has been especially critical to my growth as a black-student-prisoner. I had been in solitary a few times in the early years of my confinement and I had never really thought about its effects on me. Maybe because of the relatively short duration of my stays, or because of the accepted normalcy of going into solitary for punishment, I failed to consider the consequences of being separated from social interactions or the experiences of others in solitary. Guenther's writings on social death helped me see how solitary confinement operates on consciousness and functions as a way to perpetuate systematic oppression. Guenther (2013) writes:

To be socially dead is to be deprived of the social relations, particularly kinship relations, that would otherwise support, protect, and give meaning to one's precarious life as an individual. It is to be violently and permanently separated

from one's kin, blocked from forming a meaningful relationship, not only to others in the present but also to the heritage of the past and the legacy of the future beyond one's own finite, individual being (p. xxi).

My education began to stimulate my consciousness as I exchanged ignorance for its opposite. I began to see prison as an all-inclusive experience of solitary confinement as I contemplated its effects on my relationships with family, other prisoners, and myself. As a result, I developed a love for my newfound consciousness even as I hated my former ignorance.

Guenther's (2015) phenomenological works on the effects of solitary confinement were especially important for me as a black-student-prisoner and intellectual. Phenomenology is a philosophy that is concerned with the actual lived experience; Guenther's works incorporate prisoner's accounts as opposed to the normal theorizing by intellectuals that have no actual lived experience from which to draw. One prisoner at Valley State Prison for Women, Angela Tucker, stated that being in segregation felt like "living in a black hole" (Guenther, 2015, p. 236). A prisoner at Florence ADX, Jeremy Pinson, said that in segregation, "you feel as if the world has ended but you somehow survived" (Guenther, 2015, p. 236). I gained a greater appreciation for the power of perception to shape reality, and the importance of understanding how consciousness operates in my life; reading prisoners' writings in Guenther's academic texts was empowering. I had the opportunity to speak with Professor Guenther during a philosophy pro-seminar course taught by Wesleyan Professor Lori Gruen in Cheshire Correctional Institution and our conversation ultimately led me to a new conception of consciousness in prison, and confidence in the value of my ability to introduce new ideas into the academic field.

While reading Guenther's work I thought about my experiences in solitary and how the complete isolation felt like an escape from the constant interactions of general population. In general population, there is a total loss of privacy that deprives you of the opportunity to be alone with your thoughts for any significant amount of time. Solitary is a space within prison where you have the best opportunity to find yourself if you know what to look for and where to look. The problem is that I did not know what to look for or where to look. I was in solitary at a time when I did not possess the type of consciousness that my education helped to bring about. I was ignorant of the fact that constant interaction has the potential to alter your identity in ways that only careful contemplation will reveal. Solitary causes harm, resulting from the deprivation of meaningful human interactions, and denies prisoners the opportunity to maintain meaningful relationships, which constitutes a different type of suffering (Guenther, 2013). I was not ignorant of the fact that sustained deprivation of meaningful human interactions can be damaging to the psyche, although, without my education I would not articulate this reality in such terms. But I also recognize that solitary does not constitute the only condition in prison where meaningful interactions are impossible to maintain. The oppressive nature inherent to its design makes prison an unhealthy space to maintain meaningful relationships.

Learning is a process that I thought that I understood, and while I did intuitively, as I read Guenther's *Solitary Confinement* (2013), I came to a better understanding of why learning is so critically important for prisoners and oppressed peoples. Learning is not an inert process but rather "an initiation into meaning" (Guenther, 2013, p. 113). Learning is an active process where meaning is conveyed through action, reactions to situations, and the transformation of relationships. Meaning emerges from what is derived from the deciphering of symbols. My whole life I have been deciphering symbols in order to navigate through the worlds in which I

lived. As a Black man I recognize that my very being, my body, has become a symbol. At one-time black skin symbolized slavery and some of the associations devised at the time have survived in some form as blackness has been a symbol of sexuality, athleticism, and criminality in America. Criminality has taken on particular meanings which have social ramifications related to the past. Today, prison uniforms convey similar social meanings to what black skin conveyed in the past.

Higher education in prison seeks to produce novel interpretations of scholarship. Scholarship is most powerful when the way in which you understand yourself, and the ways that you relate to others or situations, is transformed. Education has the power to be revolutionary. I found myself amazed when, in an advanced philosophy course, I was introduced to the term *carceral logics* which are ways that ideas about incarceration enter the subconscious mind and informs thought patterns. I was forced to think about how my imprisonment may have been shaped in part by the internalization of racism. As I have learned my thought processes have been revolutionized. My values have changed and the ways in which I express myself have been refined so that I am a newer, better version of my former self. A large part of this is a result of being able to accept my circumstances, whether they be good or bad, and through understanding I have gained acceptance. This is critical as understanding emancipates me from the dark and frustrating path to which ignorance leads. I have come to love learning more as I move away from the hate for my former state of ignorance.

### **On Empowerment**

If I am to be confined, I aim to understand my confinement. I read Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and it helped me conceptualize my imprisonment, including the ways in which public opinion informed how I experienced race and poverty before I came to prison. There is a building in the book that had been a church but was converted into a pawnshop and was the meeting place for a communist group (Ellison, 1952, p. 360). Reading about the overlapping of these disparate philosophies and systems of living opened my mind to analogous complications in the worlds I inhabit. I say *worlds* because prisoners refer to everything that exists outside the prison walls as "the world." In referring to all that exists outside as "the world," prisoners signal to themselves the complete separation they experience as a result of being imprisoned. They are signaling that everything within the prison walls constitutes something distinctly different from "the world," so in this sense prisoners inhabit different worlds.

In Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), I saw how certain constructions, in his case a building, can render all that enter invisible in a literal sense as society can no longer see anyone that enters and, in a less literal sense, how the structure attempts to force conformity upon its occupants. I saw how as a result of the perceptions surrounding race and poverty in America, I had lived within this invisibility before I came to prison. I saw how prison concretized this concept by making me invisible to society. Carceral logics can play into this dynamic, in both worlds, by making conformity a requirement as opposed to allowing space or innovating relationships, if not revolutionizing them. I gained a greater understanding of how the prison as a structure shapes how prisoners are perceived; I saw how as a prisoner I must be aware of how perception plays on my consciousness and this heightened consciousness was empowering.

The purpose of higher education in prison should be student empowerment and, traditionally, that empowerment is conferred through the issuance of credentials. Conventional college students receive credentials that acknowledge their educational achievements; with such credentials, theoretically, the doors to institutions of power are made accessible. Without such credentials these same doors remain as a barrier, and the substantial social change that education in prison brings to the awareness of student-prisoners is considerably obstructed. Historically, social change has been most greatly achieved by movements that have been led by the most directly aggrieved populations. Because of the stigma and legal discrimination appended to being a convicted felon, this particular population is especially challenged when trying to effect social change. Without credential carrying members, this population has less of a chance for success upon their release. I was conscious of this dynamic when I became a part of CPE and I thought about the implications of Wesleyan not approving credentials to CPE student-prisoners. I thought about what the meaning behind such decisions meant and, ultimately, what the implications are for us as student-prisoners, and myself, as a black-student-prisoner.

Barbara Ehrenreich's, *The Fear of Falling* (1989) made me confident that my beliefs about the way that credentials have become a mechanism to effect discrimination through exclusion are not nonsensical. Credentials signal inclusion while the lack of credentials signals that exclusion is acceptable (Ehrenreich, 1989). Institutional racism comes in so many shades that it is difficult to identify, and when it comes to educational opportunities it is especially difficult to identify. The line between inclusion and exclusion is almost ethereal in the case of prison education because of the tremendous power that often lay dormant in the concrete and steel cages called cells that house the men, women, and children confined in the justice system. When educating a population that has, historically, been excluded from full participation in society, then the institution educating and empowering that population almost has an obligation to offer credentials. Anything less, rightly or wrongly, can feel disingenuous when considering change and justice for excluded populations. Blacks are such a population, as are prisoners, and I am both which renders me extremely susceptible to mechanisms of exclusion. It was only through interrogating my circumstances that I was able to reach these conclusions. My education has enhanced my ability to articulate my thoughts. It is through articulation that I have been able to reconcile the love and hate that have been constant companions my whole life.

## **Conclusion**

Higher education in prison has allowed me to examine my life in ways that I had been incapable of doing previously. I cannot overemphasize how problematic it is for the socio-economically disadvantaged to be unable to articulate their reality. Articulation becomes a form of protest in the hands of the socio-economically disadvantaged. Lacking the ability to articulate my reality, I was relegated to acting out my frustrations through the use of a "language" I spoke fluently: violence. Violence is a universal language used to communicate dissatisfaction, but it can also create the context for exclusion. I read Franz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* (1961) in my first semester as a Wesleyan student and I related to the idea that violence is the only language that the oppressor understands. I could relate to the idea that violence can feel like liberation, if only for a moment (Fanon, 1961). Fanon helped me see violence as an internal conflict turned loose on the world by those without a voice or power or by those seeking power; but Fanon also helped me to identify violence as either morally questionable or a temporary remedy and, therefore, ultimately, a mechanism of disempowerment. In modern times the very

act of violence creates the context within which the oppressed oppress themselves which conceptualizes the dynamic of love and hate with which I constantly content.

I am a Black-student-prisoner; I cannot emphasize my blackness any more than I can elide my status as a prisoner. The opportunity to pursue higher education in prison has allowed me to adopt education as my own. Two components of my identity are tied together, historically, by oppression, and all three are linked to un-freedom. Education in prison does not specifically translate to freedom, except in the sense that it frees me from a lack of knowledge. But gaining knowledge through higher education comes at a cost to prisoners and it is important for all those concerned with higher education in prison to be aware of the costs that student-prisoners must pay. Through higher education I move closer to freedom and it is that dynamic that I love. I reclaim my individuality through my education. If my education has taught me nothing else, it is that my beliefs are my own and should not be seen as representing all student-prisoners. Our experiences differ as much as they overlap, and anyone interested in higher education should value both difference and similarity. We are all living within an active trauma whose effects are exacerbated by other more specific traumas. Higher education allowed me to recognize the primary trauma of capture and incarceration whose effects often get overshadowed by the more specific traumas that occur over time.

My education has helped me confront my experiences and find some measure of comfort in spaces that are innately uncomfortable. This comfort comes not from adaptation on my part, which would equate to acquiescence in my eyes, but from an insistence that I have to change what needs changing. That begins with me. I am now an agent of change as a result of the level of consciousness I have achieved. Higher education in prison means that I now have the tools to confront institutions of power on their terms, using their language. But their terms, their language is now also my own. It means that I can understand the reasons why I both love and hate my reality. My ability to deconstruct the spaces that I inhabit, the systems of power operating in those spaces and their attendant consequences allows me to reconcile the love and hate that are my constant companions. Because of my education, prison has become more than the condition of my imprisonment, but it has not ceased to be the site of my confinement, and the space in which I must confront my existence somewhere between love and hate.

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