Carceral Geographies and Contraband Rhetoric: Black Prisoner Visual Rhetorics of Resistance

By

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Dedication

Jazmin and Shawn – for always, always believing and having it all make sense.

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Abstract

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In this dissertation, I argue that illicit, self-curated, and circulating images of black inmate life – representations in defiance of public notions of retributive punishment and "just suffering" – correlate to historic acts of black resistance and social critique that brought the rhetorical force of vernacular expression into and against dominant discursive narratives and forms. Specifically, I present case studies of A&E Network's *Beyond Scared Straight,* and an ex-inmate produced web- platform, *Freshout: Life After the Penitentiary* to argue the principles of contraband rhetoric, fugitivity, and the figuration of prison spaces as rival geographies. I draw on visual and material rhetoric studies and Black studies in order to track the influence of carcerality and inmate culture within the spheres of commerce, public discourse, and popular consciousness. Circulation of self-narrativizing images of prisoner existence, knowledge, and experience have historical antecedents in earlier African-American representational reclamation efforts. Visual reclamation of black representation followed an established literary self- rehabilitation project in an historical lineage continuing into our networked present. Accordingly, this writing offers an interrogation of types and sources of racial images, prisoner produced and otherwise, in order to make sense of the power relationship between dominant culture produced racial images and the

representational reclamation project of resistant Black incarcerated subjects. Furthermore, this project demonstrates the reach of carcerality as phenomena extending past social/political re-dress; inmate and prison culture has tangible influence in the public sphere as a touchstone for masculine identity and popular culture.

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INTRODUCTION

"Between You and Me, This Shit Ain't Half Bad." Contraband Image Circulation and Rhetoric

On April 25th, 2013, Chattanooga, Tennessee's WRCB-TV News broadcast a feature with the alarming lead: "What you are about to see may change your perception of what's happening behind bars," the anchor continues, "the Channel 4 I-Team investigation exposes shocking video and photographs of what is apparently happening in our prisons. Inmates having a good time (my italics) while your tax dollars pay for their food and housing. And perhaps the most stunning part of all […] is how the Channel 4 I-Team caught them." The news anchor's performative outrage is an impressive stand-in for the viewing public's presumed shock at being shown "inmates having a good time, smoking, and having snacks" (WRCB 00:15-00:23). The story's chief investigator speaks aloud the public's thwarted assumptions about the convicted when he contends, "jail is supposed to be bad. Bad food, little comfort…." Overall, the broadcast simulates the tone of an imagined viewer's violated sense of justice and fairness; these inmates, it seems, are simply not suffering enough. They eat the food of the free and full citizen; they laugh full-throated, and stand erect as if unburdened by the weight of penal justice.

The I-Team chief investigator continues; in the background plays a "B-roll" – the introductory video graphic supplementing the main story - of stock prison footage: keys, locks, barbed wire, and multiple cell doors and gates slamming shut. Anonymous and generic inmates populate the montage. Filmed from the neck down, their individual identities collapse into carceral anonymity, while horizontal prison stripes enrobe their disembodied arms and legs thereby reifying their pariah status. Reporter: "We uncovered all of this simply by getting on Facebook. And you are probably thinking, 'well, you have to have a phone or computer to get on Facebook and inmates don't have either behind bars.' That's the problem: these inmates are

operating the pages - not someone on the outside. What they're showing themselves doing is infuriating victims and has the state facing real questions" (WRCB 00:23-00:41). The B-roll segues to inmate created video content. Immediately, one notices a striking contrast between the news studio's preceding "prisoner life" video graphic and the inmate produced images that follow. The stock reel depicts familiar signifiers of the pains of incarceration: ladles drop slop onto plastic meal trays, convict bodies idle on picnic tables, a dizzying kinetic of metal gates closing, and the metallic finality of a deadbolt activated - in contrast to the depicted inmate's disjointed limbs - by a fully embodied corrections officer (see fig. 1).

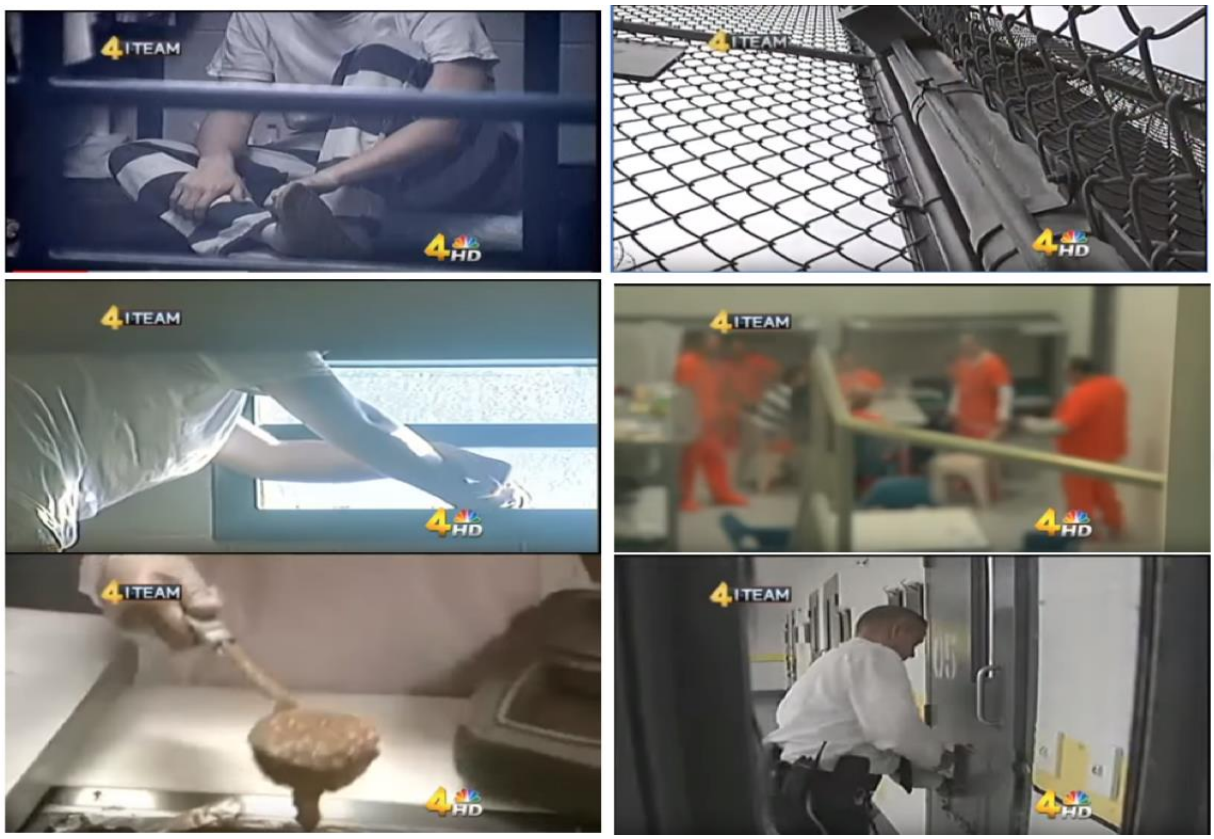

Fig.1. Stills from B-Roll,"100 TN Prison Inmates Party, Show Drugs & Cash."

In contrast, the inmate produced videos offer up whole and vital black bodies. Moreover – and in keeping with the news segment's alarming tone - their demeanors do indeed mock

public expectation: broad smiles and brash laughter; obviously self-aware enactments of fraternal bonding coupled with street and hip-hop inflected performances of masculine bravado. A tableau of inmates eating a chain restaurant pizza, talking on cell phones, and smoking pot follows. Then a montage of Facebook profile pages that graphically countervail the broadcast's fear and anger provoking chronicle of contraband practices with a strikingly ordinary - even banal - display of profiles and images. (see fig. 2) Inmates, it seems, are not unlike most social media users; they carefully curate their profiles to sway a viewer's perception of their lives and lifestyles behind bars. In other words, the Tennessee Department of Corrections (DOC) inmates dramatically exposed here as users of contraband technology and online access fill their Facebook walls with the trappings of a comparatively full, exciting, and good life.

Rhetorical visual analysis of the newscasts' structure and content exposes a revealing tension between network and prisoner produced images: both B-roll and inmate produced images are carcerally descriptive rhetorical artifacts that supplement each other while nevertheless standing in stark opposition of each other. The B-roll, in conjunction with the news segment, offer a framing and prescriptive narrative of prisoners and prison life in service to a constellation of public perceptions concerning race, retributive justice, precarity, and social order. On the other hand, inmate videos and images present a counter-rhetorical redress of the same public opinions but from the carceral subject's perspective as an exercise in agency and resistance through self-image production circulating beyond the confines of prison walls.

Fig. 2.: Stills from inmate-produced video footage "100 TN Prison Inmates Party, Show Drugs & Cash."

Inmate produced depictions of contentment, happiness, incorrigibility, innovation, and self-possession resists the flattening rhetoric of retributive justice thereby forcing the viewer - for

good or for ill - to recognize the inmates' embodied humanity. Moreover, the circulation of these illicit images amounts to a discomfiting imagistic incursion into the homes and consciousness of the public sphere. The broadcasts' urgent rhetoric intimates the looming danger of an actual physical escape. Functionally, it is a warning to the viewing public. Not so much that an escaped convict is on the loose, but that these wards of the Tennessee DOC - though securely imprisoned - have nevertheless shattered public confidence in the implied safety symbolized by correctional institutions and the penal system as a whole. Moreover, it is important to make note of WRCB TV News' complicity in the circulation and transformation of prisoner-curated, contraband images. If public consciousness is alarmed by a spectral "fugitive-at-large," one can imagine such anxiety compounding when the newscast plays a cellphone recording of an inmate named Rivera Peoples, standing amongst a cluster of inmates declares: "Between me and you - this shit ain't half bad" (fig. 3).

One is given to ponder, considering the newscast's tacit commitment to deliver Peoples' message and flippant attitude into the homes of as many viewers as possible, what role does media outlets such as WRCB TV news play in the retransmission, circulation, and consumption of virally circulating, platform hopping visual artifacts? What does it mean when mass communication outlets abet this fugitive rhetorics' escape? What is the impact of contraband images rhetorical circulation from prison cells, to the Internet, and then into the public sphere? As rhetorical objects, how do various publics receive them? Examination of these questions conclude that circulation of these rhetorical artifacts is a function of African-American inmates' declarations of resistive and performative provocation. In other words, having been institutionally, legally, socially denied access to conventional modes of public discourse, the

featured black inmates use reproductions of their black bodies and willful actions to make claims and launch critiques into a shocked and anxious public sphere.

Fig. 3.: Still from inmate-produced footage of Rivera Peoples "100 TN Prison Inmates Party, Show Drugs & Cash."

A. Contraband Rhetoric

In this dissertation, I argue that illicit, self-curated, tactically circulating images of black inmate life - representations that defy public notions of retributive punishment and "just suffering" – correlate to historic acts of black resistance and social critique that brought the

force of vernacular expression into and against dominant discursive narratives and forms. Specifically, I present the concepts of contraband rhetoric, fugitivity, and the figuration of prison spaces as rival geographies in order to describe the circulation of non-sanctioned visual information into the spheres of commerce, public discourse and consciousness. Fugitivity and viral circulation of self-narrativizing images of prisoner existence, knowledge, and experience have historical antecedents in American slavery and the socio-political tides that followed. Accordingly, this writing offers an interrogation of types and sources of racial images, prisoner produced and otherwise, in order to make sense of the power relationship between dominant culture produced racial images and the historic self-representational reclamation project of resistant black subjects. The WRCB TV B-Reel vs TN DOC inmate videos, for example, parallel 19th century American print and photographic media representation of runaway slaves verses black counter-representations that circulated via conventional and nonconventional channels. Instantiating a version of an historic relational and rhetorical power dialectic, this example from our contemporary carceral mode of extreme racial containment resonates with Sarah Blackwood's exploration of Antebellum Era fugitive slave portraiture. Along the way, Blackwood details various types, sources, and end goals of mainstream racial representation: advertisements, broadsides, newspapers, "scientific illustrations," and popular culture.

Highlighting the ways such images are inescapably fugitive, Blackwood asserts "[t]hese depictions, while certainly part of a larger cultural effort to "codify racial difference," like many documents related to slavery, produced meaning far in excess of their original purpose" (100). The meaning produced in "excess" of the artifacts' original racializing purposes present as slippages into racial ambiguity, displacement of socially entrenched racial meaning, and unexpected fluidity of social structures predicated on racial notions. In other words, excess of

meaning implies a type of representational flight from prescriptive mainstream racial depiction and production. Ours is a shared interest in racial representation's attempts to contain black subjectivity in the service of dominant cultural and political logics along with the racialized image's perpetual escape - or fugitivity - from its original objectives. Fugitivity, then, is characteristically distributed; its narrativizing flow stems just as readily from mainstream representation as from black counter-public sources.

Just as the history of representational racial formation has been an attempt to fix, at grave cost, black subjectivity through images, the black historical response to such imagistic containment parallels the history and practice of material world resistance, including the historic origin of this writings' central metaphors – African-American escape, fugitivity and flight. In brief, black literal and figurative flight from real world and symbolic racial containment marks the fugitive subject/image as contraband. Real world examples from history gives us: runaways, runagates, and fugitive slaves. The Constitution's Fugitive Slave Clause, Three-Fifths Clause of 1787, The Fugitive Slave Acts of 1793 and 1850 all secured the escaped slave's contraband status. Defined as such, they were illegal objects prohibited from import or export. Contraband, as a term evolved to specifically define escaped slaves that fought on the side of the Union during the Civil War.

Symbolic flight from representational racial containment – mainstream and popular culture's caricaturizing and unjust rendering of black bodies and existence – came in the form of African-American rhetors rehabilitating negative racial formations and replacing them with self-narrativizing renderings of black humanity, dignity, and agency (Chaney; Cobb; Fleetwood). Correspondingly, there were high political stakes at play when African-Americans – free and enslaved – took to circulating rhetorically freighted self-conceived renditions, in literature, art,

and journalism, of black humanity into the world. Literary representation in slave narratives by the likes of Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass are the most familiar examples of African-American representational reclamation. What these and other black cultural productions have in common is a mainstream misrepresentation countering conscious and purposeful redefining of black representation. This early reframing of black representation appended to real world fugitive practices, like escape from enslavement, are core conceits of the analysis that follows. Contraband Rhetoric, then, is a persuasive visual/verbal liberation tactic evolved from historical black expressive culture. Its late iteration - the production and circulation of self-produced images depicting incarcerated African-American pleasure, joy, truancy, and resistance – is remarkable in its conflation with digital technology during this moment of extreme racial containment in the form of mass incarceration.

B. Review of Literature

Contraband rhetoric and practice link to other scholarly inquiries concerned with race, space, and rhetoric including: rhetorical circulation (Warner), counter-narratives and discourses (Bamberg; Carmen; Nunley), and the semiotic expression of identity produced within a vacuum of power (Cintron). All of these investigations exemplify how rhetorical studies, partnered with social theory, uncover important links between bodies, subjectivities, materiality, and language. Moreover, such disciplinary overlap between social science and rhetoric facilitate our discipline's commitment to social justice by valuing marginalized discourses along with the material spaces and conditions from which they arise. Importantly, in addition to loosening disciplinary boundaries, such intersectionality offers a comprehensive schema through which to observe and theorize the rapid speed of change and complexity within the context of neo-liberal

logics. Additionally, interrogating contraband rhetoric's association with carceral space and the history of racial containment adds to preceding inquiries that address the intricate interrelationship between society and spatialities – i.e., Edward Soja's socio-spatial dialectic (Lefebvre; Mandel; Soja) by theorizing the dialogic relationship between public-sphere discourses and black counter-discourses modulated by space.

As this current project explores the rhetorical potential of inmate produced images buoyed by the rhetorical potency of real and imagined prison geographies, the usefulness of the aforementioned scholarship increases when tied to investigations attuned to the visual rhetoric of imagined others related to imagined spaces. Adela C. Licona, uses the term non/image – images hyper-modulated by imagined threats posed by a racial other - and details how non/images circulate in what she calls regimes of distortion (ROD). Described as "a visual and affective rhetorical claim without (the need for) an actual referent that functions as a taken-for-granted given-to-be-seen and circulates as precarious rhetorics" (169), non/images are at the core of scopic disciplining schemes that contract practices of looking so that racial others are perpetually recognized as threats. Produced in a ROD, non/images circulate in the public imaginary as distortions that "function differentially to assign distinct de/valuations and vulnerabilities to particular human and nonhuman bodies (including bodies of land and bodies of knowledge)" (169). While Licona's exploration of non/images and RODS are concerned with the rhetorical circulation of visual/non-visual representations of im/migrants, her argument is a valuable addition to visual rhetoric, circulation, race, and space scholarship. Acknowledged as such, contraband rhetorical images and fugitivity engages with Licona's observations in their mutual concern with racial images' production tied to specific spatialities. In other words, non/images, like contraband rhetorical images, conjure up an imagined threat (an illegal criminal immigrant/

an escaped black prisoner), intrinsically linked to geographic spatiality the boundary of which is imagined to bulge with the weight of restive bad actors (the US/Mexican Border/ carceral sites).

C. Racial Containment and Rhetorical Inquiry

Scholars of race, history, and sociology have long recognized specific geographies as sites wherein discourses and strategies of black liberation and resistance are developed. (Nunley; Fields; Camp). Additionally, scholars of rhetoric have endeavored to explicate the tightly bound relationship between race-based spatial containment, the resulting de facto delimitation of black democratic participation, and importantly, the impactful circulation of emancipatory rhetoric from within these marginalized spaces outward into the public sphere. In this vein, rhetorical scholarship has enriched the discoveries of cultural and social science research through robust investigation into the manifold oppositions awaiting black emancipatory rhetoric upon first exiting racinated spaces and its eventual penetration into public sphere discourses. Arguing, "[t]he partitioning of race and ethnicity has seeped into American settlement and spatial practices," Vorris Nunley contextualizes this phenomenon's relationship to rhetorical scholarship: "accompanying the much-touted linguistic turn of literature and critical and rhetorical theory is a spatial turn that increasingly recognizes space and knowledge as ideological and rhetorical" (Nunley 43).

Such a turn, while indebted to Lefebvre, lies situated amongst a range of intersectional spatial, social, and identificatory analyses advanced by the likes of David Harvey, Dolores Hayden, Doreen Massey, and Daphne Spain. Further enriching these interconnected fields of inquiry are the works articulating links between black narrative culture, symbolic space, and self-representation - scholarship that offers a lineal survey of protean African-American rhetorical

emancipatory practices that work with and against historical majoritarian discursive mechanisms (Gates; Stepto; Werner).

Racial containment research has explored racial partitioning's role in the consolidation of US political and social identity and practices (Alcoff and Mendieta). Such research describes containment as geographic border drawing, as a process by which identities are defined through spaces, and as an overall space contingent policing of difference (Said; Shapiro; Smith). Research concerning African-American containment and the rhetoric produced therein link to scholarship concerned with race, space, and rhetoric including: rhetorical circulation (Warner), counter-narratives and discourses (Giroux et al.; Hall; Montecinos), and the semiotic expression of identity produced within a vacuum of power (Cintron). A good deal of African-American Studies research builds upward from fundamental inquiries into the geo-political history of US racial containment (Camp; Higginbotham; Lacy; Nunley; Pattillo; Vlach). Such research narrows the investigative scope of racial containment, attending to the socio-historic arc of black counter-publicity and rhetorical practices produced in clandestine antebellum sites, black churches, middle-class suburbs, workshops, artisan spaces, and other black sites. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, for example, considers the intra-racial (and intra-spatial) tensions faced by black women as they contributed to the development of the black church as an engine for political change during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Significantly, Higginbotham's historiographical project turns to the rhetorical when she addresses the politics of respectability, a performative rhetoric promoting black "temperance, cleanliness of person and property, thrift, polite manners, and sexual purity" that entailed the "reform of individual behavior as a goal in itself and as a strategy for reform" (187). As part of a broader racial uplift project, black respectability performances were both internally and

externally directed; enacted within the black spatiality and in the public sphere. Simone Browne advances a critical reinterpretation of panopticism by identifying the slave ship as literal site of racial containment and an enduring metaphor for surveillance as a racial containment practice. Browne presents a compelling association between the slave ship, the Panopticon, racial bondage, containment, segregation, and contemporary mass-incarceration (43). Racial surveillance, defined thusly, is a containment practice that delimits black mobility and regulates the production of material, legislative, and ideological black spatialities. Christina Sharpe also locates "an insistent Black visualsonic resistance to that imposition of non/being" within the wake of chattel slavery's enduring condition of "antiblackness as total climate" (21). Sharpe's reference to the "visualsonic" links her theories to rhetorical scholarship concerned with visual, performative, verbal, and textual practices – alternative discursive forms - animated by and through containment practices and spaces (Browne; Cobb; Fleetwood; Hall; Iton; Raiford). Contraband rhetoric/practices interrogated and defined herein are linked with the scholarly conversations referenced above through a common concern with racialized spaces and the attendant culturally specific African-American responses associated with them.

Of late, prominent social theorists have described parallels between the political, social, and economic strategies undergirding contemporary mass incarceration and the historic institution of African-American chattel slavery, racial apartheid, and various racial containment strategies (Alexander; Blackmon; Davis; Wacquant). Rhetorical studies have kept pace and supplemented social science scholarship by examining the ways prisoners resist, speak truth to power, and circulate critical narratives of the carceral state and broader society (Hauser; Marback). While not directly concerned with racial containment practices in the United States, Gerard Hauser's theorizing of political prisoner's discourses of resistance offer compelling

analogues between the containment of already marginalized subjects and the rhetorical tactics they use to circulate their critiques, claims, and dissidence. For Hauser, prisoners of conscience circulate vernacular discourses of resistance that obliquely reference mainstream human rights appeals and political arguments. However, his hard distinction between POCs and "convicted felons" misalign with conclusions made by scholars like Lisa Corrigan and Dan Berger who've noted the black liberation era figure's contention that all black inmates are political prisoners under hegemonic oppression. These inquiries, in addition to the scholarship above, preview a rich and ongoing conversation amongst a varied group of specialists concerned with aspects of mainstream racial representation linked with containing spatialities and the responses, quotidian and libationary, of marginalized subjects confined therein. Conceptually, contraband rhetoric/practices enrich and bind together the inquires outlined above by interjecting the contemporary black response to the newest iteration of race-based containment strategies complicated by digital technologies' omnipresence.

D. Mass Incarceration

Marking the historical profit-driven regulation of black bodies' movement through space and time generates new terms that reveal scholarly attempts to draw new conclusions from old intractable questions: "The New Peculiar Institution" (Wacquant), "The New Jim Crow" (Alexander), "The New Plantation" (McKittrick). Detailing a clear historical thread of racial containment forms, Loic Wacqaunt states, "slavery and mass imprisonment are genealogically linked…one cannot understand the latter, its timing, composition … without retuning to the former as historic starting point and functional analogue" (Race, Law, and Society). Recognition of this historical continuity takes its most profound form in its interrogators' special

consciousness of race and racism's centrality to the entire American enterprise. Accordingly, these interrogators - scholars, organic intellectuals, activists, and prisoners - investigate and/or marshal counter-rhetorics generated within and in critique of historic racial containment sites and practices. In the introduction to The New Abolitionists a collection of prison writing /(neo)slave narratives - Joy James argues "[t]he old plantation was a prison; and the new prison is a plantation. Both reconfigure the (white) rural landscape, receiving and processing bodies forcibly transported, at times from "black" spaces into often culturally unfamiliar territory" (xxiii). James continues, expanding this historical race, space, and racial containment paradigm into the contemporary moment, all the while juxtaposing past and present captivity narratives and their emancipatory rhetoric.

Defined by James as "narratives," that "emerge from the combative discourse of the captive as well as the controlling discourse of the "master" state" (xxii) (Neo)Slave narratives are intricately bound, in content and form, with dominant discourse. Content presents as the long-standing historical critique of American justice, democracy, and ethics and form, in the ways (Neo)fugitive-slaves access, exploit, adapt, and appropriate mainstream non-textual media forms and genre to destabilize the definitional surety of dialogic forms. James, while citing abolitionists Frederick Douglass and Harriett Jacobs' use of photography, Mamie Till's decision to circulate images of her son's brutalized body, and the lynching photos featured in the Without Sanctuary exhibit, asserts that "textual (neo)slave narratives have been buttressed (and may at times be supplanted in their evocative power to affect civil society and mobilize resistance) by visual or pictorial (neo)slave narratives" (xxxi). James' observation engages other inquiries concerned with visualities' tensions and affordances when enjoined, implicitly or explicitly, with racial justice literature (Blackwood; Hesford; Neary). Correspondingly, prison writers - like fugitive

slave biographers - have kept pace with the dynamic socio-political responsiveness of racial containment thereby inspiring terms such as “Neo-slave Narrative” (James), “New Abolitionists” (Davis), while also referring to the penal captive’s publicly circulating socio-political critiques as “Fugitive” thoughts (Hames-Garcia).

E. Visual Rhetoric/Images as Alternative Discourse

Historically, the link between black textual racial justice rhetoric and pictures is also a conflation of their emancipatory aspirations with technology. As 19th century American industrialization witnessed a boom in the production and circulation of visual media, there was a corresponding up-swell of racial anxiety, contention, and unease; rapid production and wide distribution of image laden print media gave legitimacy to extant caste distinctions. Conversely, taken within the textual assertions and appeals supporting black humanity and manumission, imagery or more precisely black recovery of their own imaging, becomes a powerful counter-discursive rhetorical form. In theorizing her concept of image vernaculars, Cara Finnegan references Alan Trachtenberg’s inquiries into the ways “early photography functioned not only as a mass medium, a technology, and an art, but also as a rhetoric: a metaphor, an image, an idea” (Finnegan 63) in support of her own speculations into the public’s social knowledge of photography and the ways photographic images obtain the axioms of broader public knowledges. For Finnegan, images are rhetorical in that they are “context-bound and tied to the everyday experiences of audiences” (63), suggesting that the imagistic “event” is only ever inconsistent in conveying its own meaning; audiences, with the whole of their constitutive experiences, construct an image’s meaning. In this way positing a visual enthymematic, Finnegan, Trachtenberg, and others suggest that a given image’s persuasive potential is bound to its

viewer's unstated, framing, and self-evidentiary presuppositions. For black anti-slavery/human rights advocates, augmenting textual and dialogic arguments with photography was a rhetorical gambit; self-composed images of black being - imagistic "things" in newspapers, journals, broadsides, popular outlets - circulating throughout the nineteenth century's dynamic media-scape worked to contest their viewing public's image vernaculars of race, class, social progress, rationality, and politics. In other words, the distribution of these images amounted to black American truancy from racial epistemological containment.

Laurie Gries' new materialists and iconographic tracking contributions to visual rhetoric, rhetorical, and circulation studies are adaptable methods through which prisoner images may be understood as distributed "things" within digitally networked culture. Her new materialist's take recognizes digital images as objects that circulate and change as they impact, and are impacted by, various publics. Iconographic tracking offers a unique methodology through which prisoner images are conceived as imagistic rhetorical statements that demand and receive public attention. Gries' reimagining of the persuasive force of pictures align with contemporary prisoner resistance tactics derived from earlier forms of black imagistic re-representation. A cadre of thinkers have analyzed the link between how such images are constitutive of the particular site of racial containment and the consequences of their circulation as counter-discursive artifacts in the public sphere (Chaney, Cobb, Fleetwood, Raiford, Wilson).

Taken up with Henry Louis Gates' rhetorical analysis of Frederick Douglass' prodigious circulation of self-curated images, Gries' formulations help to elaborate Gate's assertion that Douglass' acute awareness "that images matter" is a function of what Robert Stepto identifies as Douglass's intrinsic distrust of the white (reading) gaze. More specifically, while Douglass' writing capitulates to its abolitionist sponsor's meticulously curated redemptive "branding" of

black subjectivity, he nevertheless demonstrates recognition of its inability to make him fully legible within the dialogic genre's legitimizing scale. Accordingly, Douglass repurposes the narrative chiasmus from his text into pictorial chiasmus depicting "the reversal of the black slave object into the black sentient citizen subject" (Gates 40). Douglass' daguerreotypes are therefore self-curated and self-representations purposefully circulated beyond what Janet Neary calls "the textual mechanisms of containment" (7). An early adopter of photographic technology, Douglass used 160 photographic images of himself to show that free and enslaved African Americans were as variant as any other human. As a supplement to the static "articulate survivor" biographical narrator, Douglass' images prove that a "black subject doesn't "look alike" over time…he varies from self to self…a self always unfolding: dynamic, growing, changing, evolving" (Gates). Importantly, he purposefully distributes these images across various publics - abolitionists, free blacks, pro-slavers, politicians, and journalists – that would alter the image's form and content in their re-distribution.

Jasmine Cobb also theorizes the circulation of black nineteenth century self-defining re-representational images. Specifically, she elaborates the ways that African-Americans "pictured freedom" and how circulating images of black self-representation threaten the "visual logic" of slavery and white subjectivity. Of particular interest is her visual rhetorical explication of the "transatlantic parlor," a racial containment space the material attributes of which are re-represented along with black subjectivity. Visualized black freedom, negatively represented as oafish, unsophisticated, and pretentious in mainstream media, helped to quell and negotiate bourgeoisie Euro-American anxieties about the threat of black freedom. Cobb's analysis of imagistic reproductions of nineteenth century transatlantic parlors correlated with black

freedman's subjectivity offers interesting historic and cultural parallels to mass incarceration era black inmate visual rhetorics of resistance.

Inmate produced discourses of resistance have been interpreted in rhetorical scholarship primarily through their dialogic dimensions. This includes counter-discourses and forms (Hauser; Marback), prisoner activism and citizenship claims (Harnett et. al.) and also, various forms and genres of externally circulating vernacular rhetorics of resistance ranging from "prison writing," (James; Prejean) to "street fiction," literature authored by former and current inmates (Van Orman and Lyiscott). The range of disciplines represented in this review of literature testifies to the novelty of prisoner-produced images. Accordingly, my intervention in the form of a comprehensive theory of illicit production and distribution of prisoner images – contraband rhetoric - reimagines the black carceral containment territory as an "alternative way of knowing" or a rival geography. Contemporizing historically black spatialities and rhetoric centers vital conversation with rhetorical inquiries concerned with digital technology, participatory media platforms, and actor networks (Eyman; Warnick and Heineman; Grabill and Pigg), race, vernacular practice, and online communities (Brock, Byrne), and analysis of visual rhetorics aligned with affect (Ahmed, Foss). Illegally produced and publicly circulated inmate photography presents a new field of rhetorical research and interdisciplinary possibility. Encouragingly, such disciplinary overlap facilitates rhetorical scholarship's' commitment to social justice by contextualizing marginalized discourses alongside the material conditions from which they arise.

In addition to inmate created and circulated images, this writing is equally focused on the production, function, and lives of racial images. Although its central premise is that racial images have lives independent of their creator's original intent, it is nonetheless important to consider

racial imaging as it influences, validates, or pushes against the viewer's acceptance of its presumed verisimilitude to black material world subjectivity (Fleetwood 2011). This is no small consideration. Ronald Jackson's figuration of the corporal black body as "a social instrument that figuratively holds the projections of others in the confines of its text" (Jackson 7) compellingly advances a metaphor of the black body as it – as an idea, concept, vessel for meaning – appears in the public sphere as a discursive force that compels a myriad of societal reactions and negotiations. This project, following Jackson and others points to the manifold ways in which black corporeality persists as a radiating node of discursive meaning coterminous with legislative, juridical, political, cultural, and social texts in service to white supremacist/anti-black policing regimes. In so doing, it interrogates the ways racial imaging plays out in the digital today as an astonishingly adaptive product of old and new logics of racial representation. Just as the industrial printing press informed popular 19th century conceptions of race, so has digital technology – as visual and textual medium – greatly informed popular conceptions of race today (Nakamura).

Image and image production are here considered holistically as a generative and emancipatory precursor to circulation. Attending to production means to disaggregate the buying and reselling of contraband communication devices and the social and economic capital embedded in every exchange. Unpacking broader meaning - in other words, a rhetorical explication - of contraband materials and activities related to the inter-carceral cellphone market affords insight into the economic logics of racial containment of which penal institutions are but a microcosm. Rhetorical Studies can provide close contextualization and a comprehensive theory detailing how and why these visual/verbal rhetorical statements transcend mere (illicit) social media indulgence and enter into the realm of public discourse, governance, and commerce. Our

field is optimally positioned to interrogate the ways in which these statements and claims circulate, impact, and change the world. Moreover, Rhetorical Studies' commitment to social justice and the amplification of counter-rhetorical forms and statements find that prisoner generated and circulated images amount to a counter-rhetorical critique of racial containment and de-humanization launched by black incarcerated subjects. Analysis of contraband rhetoric/practices helps to excavate intersections of visual rhetoric, racial containment, carceral studies, racial formation, and technology thereby unveiling a ripe field of inquiry.

F. Defining Terms

Contraband rhetorical images are a pictorially persuasive form of inmate resistance and self-assertion. They are images produced by inmates, self-curated in a manner that allow for declarations and claims about inmate conditions as well as their will to transcend dehumanization, extra-judicial punishment, and the pains of incarceration. Additionally, these images are rhetorical because they are meant to convey strength, mental and emotional fortitude, happiness, and self-possession as they circulate in the outside world. Inmates, through verbal and performative critiques, pictorially defy state-sentenced social death thereby self-resurrecting as social entities with the capacity to remotely impact the thoughts and actions of others. Importantly, circulation is aforethought during the images' production. In other words, inmates explicitly desire that the images are viewed by various publics as rhetorically impactful artifacts that warrant - even demand - the free world's engagement.

These images feature, and are the product of, a procession of contraband practices that utilize contraband objects. Their rhetorical potency derives from the correspondence between the images' form and content. Circulating inmate produced images in and of themselves are a

contraband communicative form. Likewise, their content - depictions of self-recorded inmate behavior performing qualified freedom within visually re-defined carceral geographies - is equally contraband. Form is, of course, linked to its mode of production which, during the creation of contraband rhetorical images, is an interconnected practice of acquiring contraband items to produce the images (form) and convene an array of illicit commodities, objects, and substances in a rhetorically significant manner (content). Material contraband includes cellphones, but also items smuggled in and used as props, markers, or symbols of elevation from bare-life. Examples include fast food, clothing, electronics, books, magazines, drugs, alcohol, music, grooming products, etc. The practice of gathering, safe-keeping, and displaying materials becomes contraband rhetorical practice when all pretense of clandestine activities and behavior is abandoned for the sake of virally circulating conspicuous display. Contraband, both rhetorical images and practices, differ from conventional notions of prison infraction because of the inmate's impulse to publicly disclose an elevated quality of life, an impulse that supersedes the practiced necessity of concealment and surreptitiousness.

Contraband practices are a range of inmate activities that include the procurement of contraband materials, hiding illegal items, acts of disobedience, insubordination, willfulness, etc. Considering the radical containment, surveillance, and policing central to carceral existence, inmates must create gathering and acquisition sites conducive to illicit practices. Sometimes spontaneous and other times thoroughly planned, such sites are not physical inmate constructed spaces but prison spaces transformed into transitory liberation sites through guile and opportunity. Two concepts borrowed from historian Stephanie H.L. Camp, rival geography and truancy, assist in theorizing this paradoxical generation of free space within the context of advanced carceral containment. In brief, a rival geography is figure denoting the inmate's

proprietary knowledge of physical prison spaces, institutional operations, personnel, and procedure used in the service of the creation of contraband rhetorical images. Alternative knowledge of the containment space affords opportunity for the contraband practice of truancy. Arguably, the act of inmate truancy conjures up a rival geography. When an inmate purposefully malingers, hides illicit activities, plan rendezvous, or behaves covertly he is truant. Truancy denotes the near impossibility for an inmate to completely escape confinement, while simultaneously underscoring how alternative knowledge of the prison space, i.e., blind surveillance spots, guard rotation schedules, personal vulnerabilities of staff, weaknesses in security protocol etc., can create opportunity for contraband practices.

Fugitivity is a characteristic of black imagistic rhetorical transformation in the historical wake of American chattel slavery. While much scholarship has addressed the indeterminacy of images, fugitivity well aligns with much of those findings while differing only in its historic specificity. The confluence of industrialization, widely accessible mass print culture, and the national divide over slavery marks 19th century America as a site where images, race, and technology wields rhetorical force in public and political contests. African American rhetors took advantage of the rhetorical potential of words and images, from slave biographies, and political screeds, to visual art and photo/illustrative journalism. In such negotiations, black rhetors took advantage of the indeterminate nature of racial representation – their fugitivity – in order to launch critiques, self-advocate, and prompt positive change in the world. The examples of Frederick Douglass, Harriett Jacobs, Solomon Northrup and others underscore this process of inverting negative black representations for the abolitionist cause and also to assert black humanity and worthiness for full citizenship. Each biographer proceeds with a keen sense of mainstream racial notions fed by representations generated by news media, popular culture,

academia, etc. For example, taking a cue from the popular captivity narrative genre, slave biographers took the genre's thematic core – the abduction of a civilized European by a savage enemy – and reversed the main players respective representations. Hence, in telling their stories, slave biographers present as intelligent, morally upright, long-suffering, and insightful. Conversely, in detailing the infectious corruption of slavery and the catalog of cruelty they've endured, the narrators describe how they've survived physical and psychological injury at the whims of unprincipled, cruel, and often savage enslavers. Such an inversion draws its potency from each rhetors' expectation that racial representational dissonance – the frustrated expectation that a racial image contains one meaning – opens possibilities for new ways of seeing and understanding black being.

G. Chapter Overview

Toward a Theory of Contraband Rhetoric

In this chapter, I present a case study of the previously presented news report detailing Facebook using inmates from the Tennessee Department of Corrections. Here, I will detail the relationship between contraband practices, contraband rhetorical images, and fugitivity. Using this particular video as a model, I will detail the historic lineage of performative black cultural practices of subversion and resistance. Such practices, I submit, are intricately bound to, and are conditioned by, racial containment sites. Maintaining that racial containment is multivalent, i.e., never limited to mere physical containment, I proceed by arguing that the containment of black voices necessitated alternative rhetorical channels through which black rhetors partake in civic discourse. Tracing these geography inflected counter-rhetorical forms and practices from the antebellum plantation spaces to contemporary carceral sites, I will demonstrate how black-

produced visual rhetoric have countered mainstream representations of blackness while simultaneously exploiting their fugitivity.

Referencing Gries' iconographic tracking will enable me to demonstrate how the movement of racial representational forms - circulating from both the mainstream and the margins – is also a transformational record of racial "knowing." My contention is that the circulation of racial images leaves them susceptible to reconfiguration in the public imaginary. Such reconfiguration is contingent upon its respective public's knowledges, affect, and desires. Tapping into new materialist theory, I argue that the images "reconfigure" its public in turn, not just in terms of knowledge, temperament, or social perception, but also in terms of material world conditions. This chapter's aim is to explicate methods and uses of inmate pictorial self-representation to lay groundwork exploring the relationship between racialized geographies, their attendant rhetoric, and discursive interchange between black counter-public and mainstream public spaces.

Chapter 1, Case Study: The Institutional Tableau and Carceral Mise en Scène: Contraband Rhetorical Space in *Beyond Scared Straight*

Chapter one examines *contraband* rhetoric in popular reality show *Beyond Scared Straight* by expanding analytical focus so as to encompass the prison structures/conditions in addition to carceral subjects. Whereas contraband rhetoric's primary emphasis skews towards its producer's performative and discursive self-representation, this segment interrogates the rhetorical force of imagistic prison spaces and the ways inmates exploit carceral site vulnerabilities and procedural gaps in both material and symbolic registers. Specifically, I argue that *Beyond Scared Straight* derives meaning from racially coded representational associations

between living and non-living agents, i.e., inmates and prison spaces/conditions. In turn, the series' inmates exploit this human/non-human representation in order to subvert the veracity of *Beyond Scared Straight's* racial and social claims.

Chapter 2, Case Study: "Are you a Wig-splitter?": Contraband Rhetoric and the Internet Carceral-preneur

This chapter is a rhetorical analysis of an ex-convict produced website named The *Freshout Series: Life After the Penitentiary*. I will look at the site's marketing strategy and its cultivation of a fan-base - "honorary" convicts called "Wig-splitters" – in order to interrogate the site's promotion of masculine carceral culture as a social ideal. Capitalized as such on the website, "prison culture," is repackaged and marketed as a lifestyle. FOP directs a compelling marketing strategy through which a broadly acknowledged "deviant" carceral existence is transformed into a distinctly rehabilitative androcentric lifestyle coveted by a masculinist public convinced of a societal siege on manhood.

Chapter One

The Institutional Tableau and Carceral Mise en Scène: Contraband Rhetorical Space in *Beyond Scared Straight*

On January 20, 2011, the A&E Network aired Season One, Episode Two of *Beyond Scared Straight*, a late iteration of the Scared Straight! media franchise started in the 1970s. In this episode, a group of a dozen teen offenders are directed into an area labeled the "Shakedown Room" within Jessup Correctional Institution (JCI), located about 50 miles southwest of Baltimore, Maryland. A Corrections Officer (CO) informs the youthful offenders and their parents that, from that moment on, the program's participants will be turned over to the Inmate Facilitators: volunteer felons central to the program. These unlikely "counselors" get straight to the point while screen captions announce each segment of the starkly institutional maximum-security prison tour the youths will get for the next few hours.

> "IMPACT!" Bobby, inmate 208473 and the lead counselor, screams at the boys. "I-M-P-A-C-T. Inmates Making Positive Attempts to Change Teens! Understand this right now, because we don't want you to get this thing twisted. This is not some field trip that you are on; this is not the National Zoo; this is not downtown Washington DC!"

For the next 40 plus minutes of the show, the teens are bullied, shamed, and threatened as a form of attack therapy meant to terrify them into social conformity. Later during the tour, Bobby becomes incensed when one of the teens cannot resist looking directly into the camera. "Hold up, man! What are you lookin' at? Why you keep lookin' at that camera? That camera ain't here, ok?!" Bobby then points to another inmate counselor. "You pay attention to that man

on the floor, cuz at any time that camera can go. You belong to us right now! This is not their house! This is our house! So, you focus on what that man is sayin'!"

On its surface, the Jessup Correctional Institute's (JCI) *Beyond Scared Straight* episode offers a rare invitation for its viewers to enter a carceral space. The camera shadows the group of juveniles as they march, single file, through a phalanx of glowering inmates and Corrections Officers (CO). Earlier, the teens off-loaded from a prison transport bus, past concertina wire, and guard towers, entered unsympathetic and enclosing prison architecture. Funneled inexorably by featureless corridors into a windowless tiled room, the teens look ahead to the heavily reinforced door before them. In doing so, most are able to avoid the baleful stares of the IMPACT team of inmates ranged against the wall. Directional arrows, the echo of doors slamming closed behind them, and more doors yawning mechanically before them, seem portentous. Just as the program's teenage participants are radically exposed to carceral interiors, protocols, and the mechanisms driving the pains of incarceration, audience members also gain uncommon exposure to both the material and social dynamics of incarceration. More accurately, instead of merely spectating, viewers vicariously partner with inmate facilitators; the camera lunges when the inmate facilitator lunges, and runs when they run. Both inmate and camera glare at young tear-stained faces with contempt.

An I.M.P.A.C.T. surrogate, the viewer partners with inmate counselors as they "play the room" i.e., exploit their experiential knowledge of JCI's persuasive geography in tandem with their own carceral life narratives. Inmates, for example, do not just force the teens to have a seat, they do so with brutal ceremony in a room so spare and immaculate it betrays compulsory labor. The viewer/surrogate is able to intuit the room's appropriateness as an arena for attack therapy; hours of watching prison and crime dramas validate the moral appropriateness of the

setting. This allows the audience, inmates, and the severity of the space to each stand in shared judgement of the wayward teens.

Undoubtedly, fans of the show arrive primed, ready to enjoy watching terrifying felons berating, bullying, threatening unsteadily posturing "bad" boys and aspiring "gangstas." Inmate counselors recount the humiliation and potential perils of shared shower stalls. Leaking waterpipes and flaking paint and co-sign their testimonies by soaking the teen's shoulders and dusting their hair. Such is the core conceit of the franchise: dramatic presentation of the gratifying spectacle of young delinquents withering before monsters disciplined into service for the status quo. Equally undeniable is the audience's fascination and approval of the prison's pitiless and brutal materiality. Co-constitutively presented with inmates as menacing, degradative, and dehumanizing, JCI's cells, common areas, utilities, "blind-spots," and protocols are vital, non-human participants in *Beyond Scared Straight's* catalog of cruelty. More precisely, the immensely popular reality show entertains and corroborates its viewers' racial perspectives by conflating the prisoners' as well as the prisons' brutal rhetoric of deterrence. In effect, *Beyond Scared Straight* gives its audience a visual chorus of living and non-living actants[1] ostensibly serving the public good by terrifying children into social compliance.

This chapter makes a case study of *Beyond Scared Straight's* contraband rhetoric by expanding analytical focus outward from self-produced portrayals of prisoner performances to encompass the prison structures/conditions completing its pictorial narrative. Whereas previous sections of this dissertation emphasize performative and discursive elements of contraband rhetoric (i.e., pictorially documented and circulated behaviors partnered with incarcerated

1 In Jane Bennett's study of the vitality of matter she references Bruno Latour's definition of actant: "…a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; it is that which has efficacy, can do things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events" (viii).

rhetor's statements and claims), this segment interrogates the rhetorical force of imagistic prison spaces and the ways inmates exploit carceral site vulnerabilities and procedural gaps in both material and symbolic registers. Specifically, I contend that, at its core, *Beyond Scared Straight* derives meaning from its racially-coded representational associations between living and non-living agents: inmates and prison spaces/conditions. In turn, the show's inmates exploit this same interactive human/non-human representation in order to subvert the veracity of *Beyond Scared Straight's* racial and social claims.

Moving forward, I argue that the series' inmates circulate contraband rhetorical statements of agency and resistance by using alternative knowledge of the series' presentation of inmates and prison space/procedures. *Beyond Scared Straight* annotates and redacts representational aspects of its inmates in a manner that chain their subjectivity to carceral geographies and attendant attributes of state-sanctioned containment and punishment. I contend that the show's prisoners, armed with unconventional knowledge of the series' carceral subjects/structured presentations, perform re-mediating black annotation and redaction of their representation in order to subversively circulate assertions of agency, humanity, and resistance. As defined above, contraband rhetoric is the persuasive statements contained in, and circulated by, self-produced inmate images. In this study, I begin analysis of the doubled theater of inmate imaging; instead of interrogating images produced by inmates themselves, I examine the ways inmates commandeer their representation in popular media. This remediation is a particular form of contraband statement wherein inmate rhetors mine widely-held notions of race and criminality condensed in popular genres like reality television. In other words, with media like *Beyond Scared Straight*, inmates advance declarations of their own truths and subjectivities by exploiting the show's gaps and misrepresentations of Black being and carceral existence. Such reclamation

of representational subjectivity from *Beyond Scared Straight's* racially prescriptive narrativizing facilitates circulation of contraband rhetorical statements. However, because this expression of contraband rhetoric derives from externally created and scripted specular narratives (prison/prisoner television programs), I feel a need to identify both types of visual framing. The first is the institutional tableau: *Beyond Scared Straight's* cinematic, neo-liberal commodification of correctional subject/structural imaging. Second, the inmates real-time re-working of the institutional tableau: the carceral mise en scène. Just as self-produced inmate images circulate contraband rhetoric, the carceral mise en scène's reclamation of inmate subjectivity amounts to circulating and impactful contraband rhetoric.

I'll detail the interactive relationship between representations of humans and rhetorical spatiality in both the institutional tableau and the carceral mise en scène, examining the process of imagistic racial annotation and redaction in conjunction with its counterpart Black annotation and redaction, as both are concerned with the creation and circulation of mediated black imagery. The former manages to negatively supplement and erase images of black subjectivity, the latter is the conscious Black revision of that process. Annotation and redaction are key to understanding the human dimension of the non-human/human representational dyad. I'll proceed by interrogating the non-living vital materiality of prison space and protocol. Both the institutional tableau and carceral mise en scène host annotative and redactive non-living agents that affect inmate subjectivity. I will examine *Beyond Scared Straight's* transmission of popular notions concerning race and criminality through analysis of the JCI episode.

For example, prisoners within the Scared Straight Franchises' institutional tableau - the small screen reproduction of the neo-liberal state's disciplinary "modes of order" - denote a compliant, disciplined ward of the state who, having "come around" to accepting his deviance, is

eager to advocate for neo-liberal values by castigating wayward juveniles. This reformulation presents as inmates - "criminals and deviants"- transformed into de facto counselors and mentors (albeit in a monstrous fashion). Ultimately, a portion of this analysis addresses the Scared Straight programs' well-documented failure to prevent juvenile crime and incarceration. I will address this point - in underscoring the contraband - by highlighting the ways inmate "counselors" predict the programs' failure by forecasting the imminent incarceration of some of its young participants. One might anticipate, considering the aggressive pitiless tone of the inmate's counsel, that participants so targeted would be met with harsher treatment. Instead, in a gesture that inverts the show's institutional tableau into a carceral mise en scène, at risk participants are offered guidance, compassion, and preparatory instructions for prison survival if their incarceration comes to pass.

A. Racial Annotation and Redaction

Beyond Scared Straight's racial representation relies on what Christina Sharpe calls annotation and redaction, i.e., the negative supplementation and selective obfuscation of black subjectivity in media and popular culture. Sharpe calls this image production and circulation "a dysgraphia of disaster" which… "arrive[s] by way of the rapid, deliberate, repetitive, and wide circulation on television and social media of Black social, material, and psychic death."[2] Accordingly, these widely circulating depictions of black Americans are always already mediated through addition of textual information and/or bracketing out of aspects of Black humanity. Such mediation is exemplified by the insertion, under a news photo, of a blurb

[2] We see that dysgraphic positioning of Black people via abjection everywhere: from responses to the African Americans abandoned in disasters of Hurricane Katrina to the myriad cases of extra-judicial executions by Law enforcement in which black victims are framed as antagonists.

highlighting a police shooting victim's history of substance abuse. Or the ease with which mainstream media outlets' feature raw footage of black suffering and death; the former annotates the shooting victim's life, thereby rendering their death a "reasonable" consequence of drug use (Dukes and Gaither; Smiley and Fakunle). The latter redacts cursory value from black lives. Tethered to the symbolic and material specificity of *Beyond Scared Straight's* carceral setting, annotated and redacted black subjectivity meet as categorized and contained deviance. This framing – a pictorial representation of the unruly racialized subject along with the mechanisms of discipline and control is *Beyond Scared Straight's* institutional tableau. Conversely, Sharpe describes a process in which Black rhetors themselves annotate and redact injurious images of Black subjectivity. She calls such counter-mediation, Black annotation and redaction. In *Beyond Scared Straight*, Black annotation and redaction appear in its imaging of black agents' interactions with, and most importantly exploitation of, carceral sites/procedures towards their own ends. This composite imaging of rehabilitated black subjectivity with symbolic repurposing of prison sites is the carceral mise en scène.

In the pictorial sense, annotation and redaction is accomplished by manipulation of formal, compositional, and narrative elements like negative and positive space, balance, symmetry, plot lines, environment, etc. in relation to human subjects. *Beyond Scared Straight*, for example, surrounds black youths and inmates with familiar markers of incarceration in order to establish the powerful and the weak, those worthy of empathy or scorn, and those deserving freedom verses those beyond redemption. Such oppositions are useful short-hands used to inject *Beyond Scared Straight's* presentation with verisimilitude. However, close inspection reveals that both spectacle and authenticity in the series derive from the same source: the black subject's capacity to be "read" and consumed solely as either current inmate or potential prisoners.

Concurrently, Black annotation and redaction is revealed through circulation of the inmate facilitators' repurposing of representational prison spatiality/procedures into an alternate geography. Achieved through their alternative knowledge of both material and symbolic carceral structures and procedures, this rhetorical re-mapping facilitates Black corrective annotation and redaction of the institutional tableau.

B. Material and Rhetorical Prison Geography

Prison geography defined as such extends past considerations of architectural design to include material objects and conditions tangential to punitive containment. Food, water, clothing, recreation, climate control, access to fresh air and sunlight all factor categorically within the pains of incarceration's calculus. Consequently, carceral geography condenses radical regulation of inmate movement with containment of somatic development, growth, pleasure, and security. Functionally, carceral geography imposes regiments of deprivation and enticement, thereby concentrating disciplinary physiological and psychological containment within the incarcerated body.

In arguing that custodial structures and procedures supplement legal and juridical verdicts by concretizing social forces, desires, and anxieties, I follow sociologist John Law's assertion that "[s]peech, bodies and their gestures, subjectivities, and materials such as architectures, ships, aircraft or firearms, all are… enactments of strategic logics. All participate in holding everything together. All are made in, and help to produce, those relations" (92). Accordingly, a new materialist perspective helps to interrogate ways in which the prison structure/inmate duality represents an operation in excess of simple physical containment and the detained subject; the carceral binary participates in a broad network of meaning production, from mainstream

affective responses to crime and punishment to aestheticized popular culture renditions of prison life and spaces. In between, lies a continuum which includes social notions about surveillance, crime, punishment, in addition to civil and juridical pronouncements. Identified by Michel Foucault as the carceral archipelago, this network of humans, structures, forces, discourses, institutions and technology all contrive to categorically reinterpret citizens in remand into criminal deviance. In brief, this study advances by countering the idea that citizens become convicted criminals exclusively through law and juridical procedure. Instead, it underscores the constructive interactions between vibrant matter and human desire necessary to conjure criminally deviant

New materialism highlights interrelationships between carceral subjects and the objects/conditions within which they are enclosed. New Materialist theory supports reading prison geography/conditions as something beyond inert matter specifically designed for containment. Additionally, ANT[3] proposes that incarceration's materiality works in tandem with an array of social and political forces/ideologies that conspire to interpellate citizens into carceral subjects. Gates, fences, locks, cells, etc., compose a semiotic chain of meaning, the subject of which comes into view as criminal, deviant, and predictably, a person of color. Orange jump suits, for example, cling to the carceral body as new definitional skin implicating the carceral subject's behavior, station, and future. The Security Housing Unit (SHU, or solitary confinement) reproduces the subject into, among other things, an informant, weakling, or identifiably unaffiliated with a given inmate community. Possession of grooming products and commissary fare signals a carceral subject's resistance to punitive deprecation, thereby elevating their stature with other inmates. Cumulatively, interpreted through ANT, this reading of the

[3] Actor-Network Theory

human/non-human dialectic is an expression of broader public notions concerned with retributive justice partnered with popular notions of race, criminality, and punishment. Stated differently, new materialism and ANT draw attention to the fact that the physical conditions of incarceration do as much to define the carceral subject as it does to confine and discipline them.

D. The Vital Materiality of Prison Structures

Analysis of the carceral object/subject relationship demands a conceptual shift away from privileging agential humans in order to consider what Jane Bennett calls the vital materiality of things. Bennett advocates for reconsideration of matter and materiality; instead of inert "things" which humans may or may not put to use, she asks us to consider matter's vitality, as well as the ways "things" might, as vital agents, thwart or facilitate political discourse. Bennett's theoretical framing seeks to "dissipate the onto-theological binaries of life/matter, human/animal, will/determination, and organic/inorganic using arguments and other rhetorical means to induce in human bodies an aesthetic-affective openness to material vitality" (viii). Similarly, my own theoretical framework seeks to trouble the symbolic and material inertness of carceral structures, the radical density and immobility of which are perceptually heightened in comparison to the animated incorrigibility of the carceral detainee. Stated differently, my current framing aspires, like Bennett, to dissipate the prison/prisoner binary - the non-living containment structure and imprisoned human subject - by problematizing the public's aesthetic/affective investments[4] in comforting notions of soft carceral bodies subjugated by ostensibly inert

[4] Sarah Lamble refers to Agathangelou et al.'s definition of 'affective economies,' which is "the circulation and mobilization of feelings of desire, pleasure, fear, and repulsion, utilized to seduce all of us into the fold of the state." In their "Queer Necropolitics and the Expanding Carceral State," Lamble links affective economies to the ways the neoliberal state use pleasure, fear, and anxiety "to elicit support for state practices of violence such as war, occupation, imprisonment and border controls." Hence, positive and negative affective responses imply membership within the collective (231).

structures.[5] Moreover, I contend, this aesthetic/affective investment is valuable representational currency in *Beyond Scared Straight's* prisoner/structural narrative interaction within the institutional tableau.

D. The Institutional Tableau

As a visual platform doing the social and ideological work of the state, the institutional tableau betrays the function of annotated and redacted black imaging. Already gainfully circulated throughout the media-sphere as consumable pop culture and journalistic representations of black lawlessness and deviance, such imagery was ready fodder for re-composition into *Beyond Scared Straight's* racial logics. Accordingly, these heavily prescribed images of black subjectivity seemed accurate if only because of their prevalence in American culture. Because Scared Straight's branding relies heavily on actual corrections institutions for its authenticity, its use of annotated and redacted black images offered the series an air of legitimacy. However, in adopting a "reality television" model, *Beyond Scared Straight* offers up a contestable narrative; its institutional tableau betrays its own artifice. Sociologist Ray Surette points out how reality show based criminal justice programing blurs the line between journalism and entertainment: "The feel with infotainment is that you are learning the real facts about the world; the reality is that you are getting a highly stylized rendition of a narrow, edited slice of the world" (Surette 2015:19). *Beyond Scared Straight's* "narrow and edited slice of the world" is its institutional tableau's frame. Moreover, narrow and edited views of the black subjects within that frame is emblematic of annotation and redaction.

[5] I also align John Law's "modes of ordering," i.e., the composite of human/non-human, procedural, and ideological authorizing elements, with Foucault's carceral archipelago. Such a connection works favorably in this analysis due ANT's special emphasis on the agency of "things" within a given network.

The institutional tableau's interpolative efficacy lies in its depictions of collaborative black inmates, performing the anticipated registers of malice, violence, and deviance in a manner that ratifies those received stereotypes for both inmate and program participant. Arguably, the public sphere's gaze interprets the harrowing performances within the tableau, dehumanizing acts of child abuse, as a type of culturally-specific tough love.[6] Effectively, the institutional tableau circulates annotated and redacted images of black subjectivity that are representationally bracketed and definitionally aligned with negative racial attributes seemingly underwritten by black people themselves. Read as such, the institutional tableau valorizes the malicious pathology of intra-cultural anti-blackness as a public good, evidenced by the black inmates' obvious complicity.

E. Carceral Mise en Scène

Just as inmates use their alternative knowledge of material prison sites to serve their own contraband desires, the carceral mise en scène is a reworking – through alternate knowledge - of the institutional tableau. Carceral mise en scène is therefore constitutive of contraband rhetoric because of its subversion and wide circulation. Interrogating the textual/verbal/specular composite script of the institutional tableau partners methodologically with Janet Neary's concept of representational static.

> Representational static is a form of resistance to the speculative gaze. It comprises the unruly narrative gestures embedded in texts, which initially appear to merely present race and racial relations as fixed forms. Emphasizing representation as mediation,

[6] In that blackness and a perceived criminal culture are collapsed

> representational static draws attention to the forces that produce and transmit images of enslavement and their authenticating infrastructures (5).

The texts Neary speaks of range from the legislative, judicial, academic, etc. To that end, history grounded in the authority of the academy seek to represent blackness as immutable and static. Black visual representation has the capacity to expose infrastructures undergirding the stubborn fixity of text. Additionally, Christa Sharpe's wake-work reminds us that the racial containment mechanisms of antebellum era enslavement are still in operation. Authenticating infrastructures in this context turn on notions of race and class and are consolidated into an institutional tableau for consumption on the small screen. Conversely, the re-framing the carceral mise en scène is embedded in, and works to offset, the veracity of the institutional tableau. Equally invested in the interaction between carceral subjects and structures this black remediation of the institutional tableau features the inmates' rhetorical re-mapping prison spaces/procedures. This rhetorical re-mapping of *Beyond Scared Straight's* institutional tableau is made possible by its inmates' alternative knowledge of prison spaces and procedures which in turn transforms the prison spaces and conditions into an alternate geography within which inmates attain qualified freedom.

Juvenile Awareness Programs/Beyond Scared Straight

Beyond Scared Straight is the latest in a series of wildly popular juvenile crime intervention television shows beginning with the original Scared Straight documentary released in 1978. The original documentary was based on New Jersey's Rahway prison's Juvenile Awareness Project Help (JAPH) program. Developed in 1975 by inmate volunteers, "lifers," as intervention counseling for high risk juvenile delinquents, its premise was a straight forward: gather up a group of delinquents from primarily disadvantaged communities, bring them into prison to meet hardened convict-volunteers who counsel by way of insults, humiliation, and

threats ranging from violence to sexual assault. Presumably, the anticipated results of this day of shock and fear are program participants transformed from their deviant ways into law-abiding citizens. JAPH and other prison-centered attack therapy type programs were met with public and private approval, primarily because they seemed to situate the root of criminality within the individual; politicians and policy-makers no longer had to consider systemic inequality and destabilized social structures. Moreover, the solution seemed already validated in the public consciousness; who better to straightened youthful criminal behavior than adults already identified socially and juridically as criminals? Already, the in-house programs betrayed public sentiment that these were not children in the conventional sense and their type of anti-social behavior was beyond the scope of conventional interventions. This sentiment grew with the transition of the program into the original Scared Straight document.

The *Scared Straight!* documentary gave American audiences an unprecedented look inside prison interiors and culture. As a precursor to contemporary reality television programing, Scared Straight! then, as now, offered its viewers a new media experience --but one whose core premises were based in preconceptions and longstanding notions about race and criminality. Inmate and program participants' performances seemed to validated public ideas about retributive justice, deviance, and carceral life. Moreover, the spectacle of wayward teens harangued, lectured, threatened and humiliated by hardened convicts was, for some, gratifying entertainment. A report from a hearing before a 1979 subcommittee set to evaluate the efficacy of Scared Straight programs detailed:

> Scared Straight and the subsequent franchise confirmed the most lurid and terrifying aspects of incarceration and played to its audience's lurid curiosity: "Scared Straight! played to a large and enthusiastic audience. There had probably never been a television

> documentary like it: the obscene language, the descriptions of violence and sodomy, the passionate intensity of the prisoners, the resonating steel sounds of cell doors slamming shut (Oversight 197). The documentary filled American small screens with a parade of bellowing "lifers" and painfully young delinquents. While the children and adult inmates seemed the central focus of this wild spectacle, the non-human agent - the fearsome presence of Rahway State prison itself - plays just as significant a role in this spectacle of intimation and fear as the inmate "counselors." The popularity of the documentary led to a cluster of follow-ups throughout of the 80s to the late 90s. *Beyond Scared Straight* debuted in 2011 "becoming the highest rated program in the history of the Disney-owned A&E network."[7]

Scared Straight programs, both in-house and media versions, have been met with criticism. Multiple studies have concluded that program participants were more likely to commit crimes than those who didn't. Others presented strong evidence that Scared Straight programs caused increases in crime (see Finckenhauer; Slowikowski and Robinson; The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention). Finckehauer argues "Scared straight programs are developed by adults for kids, but kids don't react the same as adults, that's why the television series is popular with adults, but unsuccessful with kids. Big, muscular, tough guys are what the kids see during a prison tour as the inmates yell and scream at them in the hopes of scaring them out of committing a crime. Kids don't see beaten down losers." When asked about the popularity of the *Beyond Scared Straight* Series, he answers: "There's a gut level attractiveness, an inside look at

[7] In an OP-ED the Juvenile Justice Information Exchange Joe Vignati, director of the State of Georgia's Justice Programs at the Governor's Office for Children and Families criticized the program stating "the scared straight approach is an inappropriate and unacceptable means for disciplining children. This approach has been shown to cause short- and long – term harm and actually INCREASES the likelihood of reoffending among some participants."

prisons, clanging doors, delinquent kids. It makes for great visual appeal and good sound bites. Also, there's a great deal of frustration with perceived liberal treatment of young offender." Here, Finckenhauer underscores the affective component that makes the television imagery appealing. There is the gratifying spectacle of just punishment, but also a particular type of young offender, whose subjectivity is freighted with preconceptions added by popular perceptions or negated by illegibility.

Beyond Scared Straight, then, highlights the material rhetoric of incarceration in a manner that authenticates its dual functions of deprivation and containment. As two signal elements of the pains of incarceration, i.e., the array of state sanctioned physical and psychological punitive processes designed to elicit inmate penitence, restriction of movement and "just" suffering has not been historically limited to official corrections initiatives. American history is rife with various forms of racial containment and discipline.[8] Keeping this history in mind, *Beyond Scared Straight's* representational authorization of black containment speaks beyond JCI; the series' core conceits inherently link to societal notions of race, criminality, and class. In other words, *Beyond Scared Straight* validates the persistent logics of racialized containment up to and beyond this docutainment expression of mass incarceration. Accordingly, *Beyond Scared Straight* puts representational statements concerning race and criminality up for public consumption. It does so by offering its consumers a familiar product, spatially disciplined and confined black criminality. However, this brand of racialized carceral subjectivity is vulnerable to revision into contraband rhetoric.

[8] In his Foucauldian examination of race, topology, and geography, philosopher Eduardo Mendieta asserts: "[America] is a society that has transformed slavery and legalized discrimination into the practices of gerrymandering and gentrifying African-Americans in ghettos. These ghettos, in turn, have been functionally and structurally assimilated into the prison-industry complex" (43).

I.M.P.A.C.T. Team Members:

Anthony: Attempted 1st Degree Murder and Armed Robbery - Life sentence.

Bobby: 1st Degree Murder - Life Sentence

Irvin, aka Twin: Felony Theft - 10-year sentence.

Kelly: 2nd Degree Murder - 25-year sentence

Short "autobiographical" descriptions identify members of the IMPACT team. Outside of vague admissions of "stupid" or "hard-headed" behavior, their biographical narratives seem to begin post-offense. Recognized as such, the biographical statements are both annotative and redactive; they are redactive in their bracketing out of pre-conviction subjectivity except criminal offense. The descriptions are also annotative in that they do the biographical and authenticating work of making each inmate legible within the institutional tableau. Inmate performances of bullying, intimidation, and threats, are prime expressions of annotation and redaction in that these black male adults are seemingly configured devoid of compassion, empathy, nuance. Most impactful, however, are scenes of black inmates banding together to intervene in the wayward path of delinquent black children.

Inmate facilitator Bobby, for example, introduces himself in voiceover. He recites his name and inmate number followed by the statement, "According to the state of Maryland, I no longer have a name." Bobby's delivery betrays the routine frequency with which he recites the phrase, "I am number 208473." However, Maryland State Correction's revocation of his birth name, if we go by his tone and the running monologue under his voiceover, causes him little consternation. While the state may not acknowledge his birth name, *Beyond Scared Straight's* institutional tableau does so in a dramatically cinematic manner. Bobby's name, age, crime, and sentence are graphically displayed on screen. His on screen labeling, clothing, affiliation with

I.M.P.A.C.T., strident mannerisms, and nose to nose confrontations with program participants all coalesce into a clear performance of "prisoner" identity. His next statement further aligns his identity with prison space, but in an unexpected way, "You in OUR house, all right? And in OUR house, you going to see how full-grown men do time!" Incongruently, Bobby asserts the state has stripped him of his given name while simultaneously implying communal ownership - "our house" - over the carceral space. Bobby's assertion and performance signals a bilevel awareness of lived carceral experience and *Beyond Scared Straight's* representation at the same. Consequently, there is a presumption that inmates will convincingly perform with something in between artifice and genuine expression. The IMPACT team is mindful of this requisite performativity, just as they are mindful of the socio-institutional[9] stamp of "scariness" onto their organic subjectivities.

Inmate facilitators' on-camera statements and actions should therefore be understood as performances in which ideas about race, imprisonment, and violence converge with inmate self-narrativizing, improvising, and re-making their own representation within the media-sphere. As a result, these contraband statements turn on alternative knowledge of incarceration's material and symbolic registers. In practice, Inmates exploit - in the real world and in images - the rhetorical materiality of prison spaces in order to produce and circulate images depicting their resistance to the pains of incarceration. Bobby, for instance, announces the loss of his pre-carceral name while simultaneously declaring ownership and community within JCI. This practice, and others, transform the Scared Straight concept into a vehicle for the circulation of contraband rhetoric. However, it should be emphasized that Bobby, as a living agent, makes his claims with and against a non-living agent: the prison structure itself.

[9] Here, I state both social and institutional in order to emphasize that such categories of "scariness" precede incarceration.

Scared Straight Program Participants:

Dion: 18, Auto Theft

Sahn: 13, Shoplifting

Steven: 17, Expelled from School for Stealing and Fighting.

In one scene, Inmate Twin and others bring teens into a "blind-spot," any number of locations in the prison outside of the CO's line of sight. "We was talking 'bout blind spots, right?" Twin asks. Program participants are marched single file to a bathroom. An inmate facilitator asks which of the teens has been expelled from school for fighting and Steven, the young man earlier chastised for looking at the camera, raises his hand. He's immediately ushered into a bathroom stall with barely enough room for Steven and Twin, who's a foot taller and twice as wide. The blind spot is so cramped and the only available shooting angle is from an adjacent stall:

> "Come on in here, Mr. Funnyman," Twin hisses. "Get yo' ass up in there! You like to fight? I pushed you. What you gonna do? You like to fight? Put your dukes up and I'll knock you ass out. Put'em up! That's right. You think you can fight? Huh?"

Steven mumbles meekly. Twin continues:

> "You can't fight! You a muthafuckin' punk! Remember that! And if you come in here, you gonna have plenty of people to fight. And guess what? Some of them gon' whoop yo' ass. Might even kill you! You feel what I'm saying? Man, you better get yourself together, go uptown and think about this tour seriously. Today! And understand that this ain't made for you. You don't like to fight, you a punk!"

This scene, I argue, exemplifies an optimally functioning institutional tableau. Within it, inmates convincingly perform their ritual of humiliations and intimation; Steven is visibly terrified. If one

could predict solely by his affect, the teen is prepared to go "straight." Steven's time in the blind-spot ends yet tensions are still elevated; something seems to have piqued the IMPACT team's anger as they await the next teen's entrance into the blind-spot.

What occurs next is an unforeseen encounter that brings together inmate transformative use of space as a catalyst for black annotation and redaction. Twin ushers participant Sahn into a bathroom stall, backing the small-framed boy into a corner:

> "This what happens when people steal in prison. They come to prison and get their stuff stolen from them. You understand me? That means that somebody can come in here, in this blind spot, and bust your head wide open and take your shoes and leave you layin' for dead, man! You wanna be left that way? In a puddle of blood, somebody callin' home to your mom, tellin' them that they little baby's just got they head busted? Why are you cryin'? You like to steal! Somebody that steals shouldn't be cryin', cause you don't care about nobody else but yourself. Get outta here!"

Sahn leaves the stall looking like a terrified little boy. Facilitator bombast, rules of carceral masculinity --all of the institutional tableau performances designed to scare Sahn straight. Just outside of the stall, Inmate facilitator Anthony blocks Sahn's path and places his hand lightly on the youth's shoulder. "Don't go out there lettin'em see them tears." Anthony says, using a soft paternal voice. "Keep your head up. You hear me?" This is an unanticipated moment when all pretenses of the institutional tableau collapse: the blind-spot becomes a site of communion, the adversarial inmate/participant performance (which depends on annotation and redaction of both of the black subjectivities) are all transformed into a carceral mise en scène within which their respective humanities are revealed by the black annotation and redaction in opposition to the institutional tableau.

F. Real Prison and Television

A significant point of inmate resistance to the types of representation informing the institutional tableau is the inmate's repeated declaration that real jail is nothing like depictions in the media and popular culture. Inmate facilitator Dave, for example, demands validation after exposing the teens to the general prison population, solitary confinement, and crowds of threatening inmates. "Compare this to what you see on tv, man. That was real what you just experienced. Crap you see about prison on tv, is it anything like this?" he angrily asks. "Anything like this?"

It appears popular media-generated notions of prison life impede their ability to "scare" the teens straight. Indeed, at this episode's opening, a few of the teens are interviewed and asked what they'd expected to encounter during the tour. All had anticipated specific events and types of encounters. "I'm not afraid of going in no prison at all," Steven stated early on, before his program experience started. "If you get in my face, I don't know. Whatever happens, happens." "If an inmate get in my face, I'm gonna hit him so hard, their mom's gonna feel it," Sahn boasted, clearly unaware what awaited him on the tour. In opposition to the attitudes and misplaced confidence underwriting such statements by the teen participants, inmates hammer them repeatedly with variations of the refrain, "this is real," or "this is real life."

"I want to talk about what they don't tell you about prison or jail in general," Ex-convict and carceral-preneur Big Herc from *Fresh Out Productions* says, offering insight into how popular culture dangerously misrepresents incarceration:

> See, a lot of people they think that what they see on TV is real as far as how jail or prison is. Even the show *60 Days In* --that shit's not real it's all scripted. I had a home

> boy, close friend in Sac[10] County jail. Before they started filming, they got permission from the jail…they interview certain inmates and asked them if they would want to be videos… they had to sign a waiver. Same thing with the guards. And so what you see, all that stuff about them being in jail, and this going down over here and these guys whispering, that's just all fake. It ain't gonna be a whole lot of whispering and chatter when a motherfucker wants to split your fucking wig you won't even know its gonna happen. And when the cameras are rolling of course there's going to be things going on that wouldn't normally be going on so if you guys think that shit is real you got another thing coming all these shows, *Orange is the New Black*…*Oz* and *Prison Break,* all Hollywood.

This conversation is from a *Freshout Productions* video is entitled "This is What They Don't Tell You about Prison," a regular theme in their overall project. It is instrumental here to remember that Big Herc and *Freshout Productions'* mission is to educate the general public about incarceration. However, they also emphasize that they provide valuable advice aimed towards those who are about to be incarcerated. The rest of this video provides a list of "get used to" statements, as in, "get used to [guards] looking up your asshole. Because every time you go somewhere where you had contact with somebody from the streets you got to squat and cough." In the main, his is a list of quotidian humiliations, tedium, paranoia, and social prohibitions. While violence is a major issue, correct behavior and adherence to protocol and norms as a way to avoid violence is the rule rather than the exception.

By bringing Big Herc into the current discussion, I hope to draw attention to a few things: popular culture misapprehensions of carceral life permeate public consciousness and inmates are

[10] Sacramento County Jail

aware of cinematic tropes about prison and also how they, as inmates, are depicted. Reality Prison shows like *Beyond Scared Straight* are scripted. Misinformation circulating in cinematic representations can, if applied in real life, be dangerous for the first time incarcerated. Both Big Herc and the IMPACT teams caution against received popular ideas about imprisonment by being both informative and instructional. Tone and position are obvious with Big Herc; he offers clear advice about how to "jail." However, learning to thrive in prison runs counter to the IMPACT team's interventionist mission to dissuade teens from actions leading to incarceration. Nonetheless, the IMPACT team does provide information and instruction crucial to prison survival albeit in a diffuse manner alerting us to its contraband nature.

Program participants enter the *Beyond Scared Straight's* prison site with inaccurate fore-knowledge of incarceration fostered by the same public imaging constitutive of the institutional tableau. More specifically, teen delinquents believe that they are armed with enough knowledge, and in some cases a sense of the social cache, of incarceration as a result of consuming Hollywood cinema and pop culture. Similar to Big Herc, the IMPACT team is versed in both versions of carceral existence: the lived experience and its mythology. It is also plausible that they know, by witnessing former *Scared Straight* participants' later conviction and incarceration, that Scared Straight programs do not work, and frequently increase the likelihood of illegal activity leading to imprisonment.[11] Inmates stress over and over that in the event of their incarceration they will be alone, surrounded by predators, with no roadmap to navigate the treacherous landscape. It is this backdrop that draws attention to subversive nature of the recurring oral curricula of prison survival during the tour. Their initial lecture in prison survival

11 Jeff Maahs and Travis C. Pratt

comes immediately after arrival, when IMPACT facilitator Bobby lists fundamental rules of behavior and why they matter:

> "Rule number One is this: You say nothing to nobody!" Bobby shouts. "Rule number Two: make sure your hands are always visible! The reason for that is this: we got some people that's been locked up fifteen-twenty years. They've seen knives, shanks come out in pockets. They not right up here [points to his right temple]! They get paranoid. In other words, they react before they think! We don't want nobody reacting because you want to be stupid! Rule number Three: Don't smile at another man in prison! Cuz' if you smile at another man in prison that makes them think that you like them, and if you like another man in prison something seriously is wrong with you!"

Another unidentified inmate offers a tutorial on the dire importance of discretion within prison spaces: "If it don't concern you, pay no attention to it," he continues, "Mind your own business, man. What you see, you don't see. What you hear, you don't hear. That's the golden rule for prison." While IMPACT members are tasked to incite fear and powerlessness in their charges, they are surreptitiously sending them home with a rule book of acceptable prison behavior as contingency for possible future imprisonment. In this way, inmates repeatedly disrupt the institutional tableau's staging and narrative – unrelentingly brutal spaces and narratives – supplanting compassionate inmate discernment of the full complexity of the teenage participants lives.

G. The Unremitting Judgement of Things

While Contraband Rhetoric circulates as a visual medium, its material production and its rhetorical efficacy depends on the prison subject's relationship with material prison spaces.

Accordingly, I contend that the term "relationship" connotes rhetorical association between living and non-living agents, the inmate and the carceral space respectively. Highlights from *Beyond Scared Straight's* counseling sessions underscore the profound structural rhetoric of special cells designed less to speak of containment, and more to deride the comparative weakness of flesh and psyche. I pointedly use the term "deride" so as to honor the unnamed inmate's description of the solitary confinement cell. His cautionary claims about what happens to an inmate confined to solitary does not implicate living agents, like corrections officers, as tormenters. "Do you know what this is, this is isolation!" he announces. "Jail within jail. When you break the rules, this is the punishment right here.… Do you know how long you stay inside these cells? 23 hours of the motherfuckin' day, man. You're no longer a human bein' no more, man. You like an animal, caged in!" The space itself --its design, surfaces, and sound proofing-- conspire to transform a human being into an animal.

Repeatedly, the IMPACT team elides over human disciplinary agents employed at JCI in order to emphasize what the prison will do to you. It is profitable, prior to analysis of contraband rhetorics' imagistic signification, to detour for a look at the rhetorical dimensions of inmates and vital carceral structures/procedures. Analysis of the relationship between carceral structures and prisoners frame prison geographies/conditions as rhetorical mechanisms meant to interpellate subjectivities by transforming citizens into felons. In his rhetorical and semiotic analysis of architecture, Daryll Hattenhauer writes:

> The design of prisons also has a rhetorical dimension. High electric barbed-wire fences with armed guards persuade inmates to stay put. In addition, prison officials…often try to paint interiors with relaxing colors to reduce the frequency of violence. The ways in which architecture acts rhetorically are not only obvious and coercive but subtle and

> passive. Architecture represents the receivers' ethos and world view and thereby encourages the receivers either to change or reaffirm their behavior and beliefs (74).

While Hattenhauer's description of prison architectures' rhetorical elements summons up features that come readily to mind in the public imagination (barbed-wire, armed guards) his description of the subtle and passive too hastily negates their potential for coercion. Slit-ports for windows, for example, placed high out of the sightline, has the maddening effect of letting light enter cells, while denying visual access to the outside world. The toilet in a four-man cell that automatically flushes only twice a day is coercive as well, if we expand coercion's' implications beyond active physical force.

Consequently, structural coercion often presents as a state of deliberate scarcity: of light, space, comfort, safety, and dignity. A segment from the JCI tour illustrates material coercion - the punitive rhetorical acts of things – pressed into the state's work of constructing penitent bodies through material means:

> "I want ya'll to see this bathroom." Inmate Dave instructs. "Fifty men share two bathrooms. Do the math. You're gonna be standin'in line a long time. You got guys go up in the bathroom to shoot up. You got guys go in there to…with little boys. I'll let you use your imagination for that. All the times I walk up in this bathroom, I've seen cum, snot, shit, piss, puke on the toilet, around the toilet, on the walls, everywhere."

He describes less the toilet's revolting conditions, than what those, and other, material conditions compel inmates to do. Toilets without lids, overflowing with waste because the automatic flush isn't due for several hours, shared cells devoid of privacy, spaces- blind-spots - so foreboding that, in inmate facilitator Bobby's words, "police are not," all provoke inmate behaviors linked affectively and procedurally to retributive and just punishment.

From a popular media perspective, inmate lives occur only within the confines of the series' perspective – they are annotated on the screen with textual graphics identifying them by first name, nickname, inmate identification number, crimes for which they've been convicted and sentencing. Their lives before incarceration are redacted with the exception of details fulfilling the institutional tableau's scripted requirements. For example, a tour of the general population unit (what the IMPACT teams calls "the jungle") finds the teens pressed into a small cell:

> "You know what my mom told me this go-around?" The young, unnamed black inmate, barely older than the oldest participant, tells them. "She glad I'm locked up, 'cause I was gonna die out there. You know why? 'Cause I was out there [bleep] up. I'm gonna give it to you cut and dried. If nothin' don't wanna make you change your life, man, I hope standin' right here in this cell [unintelligible]. You hear what I'm sayin'?"

The intimacy within the space, the symbolic identification through nearness in age, and the uncharacteristically conversational tone of the inmate's appeal are enjoined as an (albeit softer) intervention. As spectators to the tableau, we are offered a mere hint of the inmate speaker's life outside of redaction. We are offered a truncated narrative serving to solidify a relational link between the young inmate's deviant behavior, which placed him outside of his own mother's desire to see him free, and his youthful audiences' deviant behavior. These half-opened windows into the inmate's unredacted pre-carceral lives are few and always cautionary (i.e., "these are the attitudes/actions that've landed me where I am today. Don't [continue to] be like me").

However, it is notable that these infrequent monologues are always uncharacteristically measured and conversational in tone. Spare in details but rich in implicated pathos, these exchanges amount to a shift in redaction, the emoting inmate momentarily bracketing out the

series-running trope of the unremitting carceral beast. These are moments of black redaction during which a fuller black subjectivity is revealed by the inmates' interruption of the institutional tableau's reductionist imperative. These are moments of the institutional tableau's slippage into carceral mise en scène. Additionally, audiences are confronted with unanticipated glimpses into black inmates' full humanity. As this process occurs in spite of, and in resistance to, *Beyond Scared Straights'* racial meaning producing mechanisms, it circulates as contraband rhetoric.

H. Blind Spots

What are blind spots? They are, in the material prison space, areas where disciplinary supervision is lacking. Inmates make it absolutely clear that blind spots are utilized because they are visually inaccessible (i.e., storerooms, staircases, remote passageways, bathrooms, or showers). Importantly, blind spots are not areas unknown to prison officials but rather unsupervised areas. Inmate counselor Bobby's statement "Blind spots are spots where the police are not" reveal blind spots are not fixed geographies, but contingent events based on the inmate's alternative knowledge of carceral spaces and procedures. Blind spots, then, are rhetorical in that they are prison geographies transformed by inmate ingenuity and desire into enabling alternative geographies of qualified inmate freedom. Conversely, in the public imagination, blind spots are fearful geographies: deathtraps. Prison cinema, for example, plays up these spaces to dramatic effect; the panoply of prison horrors occurs in blind spots.[12] Cinematic versions are physical

[12] Not to imply that real world blind spots in are not dangerous spaces. They are in fact well documented spaces in which prison violence occurs (Wolf et al.,590). I seek to emphasize is the more frequent and spontaneous clandestine sites made undetectable because they are created by subterfuge, performances, grouping together of bodies, decoys and sleights of hand. Such practices are quotidian, less about violence and domination and more focused on creature comforts, contraband items like extra food, radios, etc.

spaces where the panopticon fails. Accordingly, cinematic blind spots, to quote Bobby, are "spots where police can't see." The failure of the panopticon in films imbues the narrative with a loss of order; inmates control the un-surveilled spot and, unrestrained and unobserved, their impulses turn towards violence and exploitation (Kehrwald, Mason, O'Sullivan). *Beyond Scared Straight's* institutional tableau would present blind spots of the latter variety: as deathtraps. Its internal logic requires inmates to announce the existence of deathtrap blind spots, declare the horrors that could happen inside of them, and more or less guarantee an encounter inside one if a program participant should become incarcerated. Stated another way, inmate performances in the institutional tableau eschew talking about the more common day-to-day formation of blind spots created by alternative knowledge of sites/procedures in favor of the material space freighted with tropes of violence and danger. However, inmate contraband practices take advantage of the scripted convention of blind spots as deathtrap and in effect, transform them into sites of communion and unanticipated compassion.

In a telling example, the IMPACT team march the teens single file into the mess hall. They are given strict instructions about staying in line, looking straight ahead, and going through the motions of picking up a mess tray to gather their lunch. Inmate facilitator Bobby announces:

> "You are in the main dining room for MCIJ." This place feeds over 1100 full grown men three meals a day. Notice I said three meals. I ain't say three square meals cause ain't nothin' nutritious about these meals in prison. But not only is the food bad. I mean, this place is packed. Then if somthin' takes off or kicks off, that door right, that door gets locked, and you are on your own. 'Cause ain't no police gonna step in front of no knife for you."

Bobby goes on to once more mention blind spots, and another inmate refers to them outright as "deathtraps." Suddenly, two nearby IMPACT inmates grab 18-year-old participant Dion's shirt, lift him off his feet, and pull him into the small room. "Take 'em up in there!" Bobby hoots. "It's just that easy!" The spectacle of Dion's sudden disappearance into an unseen room and the foreshadowing talk of blind spots demonstrates the institutional tableau's scheme to highlight the precarity and potential for spontaneous violence.

Dion is rigid with fear as inmates Twin and Kelly are on either side of him inside the room. They brow beat him and force him to remove his shoes. It is an intentionally loud performance. Outside, IMPACT team command the teens to keep moving through the chow line and to keep their eyes to the front. Simultaneously, they admonish the teens to pay attention, to both blind spots and how quickly someone can be disappeared into one. The teens in the mess-hall can hear what is transpiring within the blind spot. Inmate's broadcasting and narrativizing serves a dual purpose, each statement is cautionary as well as a type of guidance: "You ain't built for this, you ain't never gonna be built for it, so don't try," Twin and Kelly bellow at Dion, before allowing him to return to the chow line. Here is an interaction, the type of which, is not supposed to occur in a "deathtrap" though experiencing intimidation and humiliation at having to remove his shoes, the inmate's tone changes: they've taken survey of Dion, saw beyond the tough teenage façade, and told him in no uncertain terms that he does not belong in JCI. Moreover, their evaluation cannot be solely a factor of Dion's age: Dion is 18, while Kelly started his 25-year sentence at the age of 15. Kelly, as a chronological peer that at the age of 15 either was, or was destined to be "built" for incarceration, is able to see that Dion is not and never will be. The institutional tableau's "deathtrap" is thereby revealed to be a blind spot, a re-

appropriated geography in which black communion is feasible because it is shielded, if only for a moment, from disciplining, annotating, and redacting eyes.

This examination of *Beyond Scared Straight* demonstrate how inmates subvert representation as violent black convicts subdued into service for the status quo. Their ability to do so speaks to their canny knowledge of the specific ways black imaging is redacted and annotated within the media-scape. From within the material confines of the prisons and the confines of racialized representation, inmates find ways of being heard and seen in their own terms. Through remediating black annotation and redaction, inmates demonstrate their awareness of carceral imaging's prescriptive power, and this offers a unique opportunity to consider how contraband rhetoric becomes impactful in the world. Close examination reveals compelling ways in which incarcerated subjects are able to remotely persuade, impact perceptions, and engage in public exchanges.

I. Conclusion

Trading on the patina of legitimacy afforded to the reality television genre, the series translates into a specular practice of containment, utilizing mainstream notions of incarceration to delimit black subjectivity into categories such as juvenile delinquent, convict, and lifer. Consequently, *Beyond Scared Straight's* representational logics demarcating the free world and the imprisoned are the very mechanisms of annotation and redaction. As media viewed through the small screen, prison geographies are the specular containment field in which representational blackness moves within defined boundaries of meaning. This chapter explored contraband rhetoric as a persuasive modality attending to both living and non-living agents. Contraband images typically direct our focus to human subjects within the carceral pictorial narrative. This

investigation of inmates featured in *Beyond Scared Straight* demonstrates that their material knowledge of carceral spaces, translates into canny awareness of rhetorical prison spaces. As a result, the featured inmates are able to subvert their anticipated functions within the show. By means of black annotation and redaction the inmate's exploit the show's representations of themselves and the prison space thereby facilitating their declarations of agency, ownership, dignity, and humanity. Further, subverted are their prescribed roles of violent racialized criminals brought to heel as agents of the status quo. Instead of simply performing attack therapy on children to "scare them straight," the series' inmates demonstrate compassion and recognition in a manner illegible to a viewership eager for racially coded aggressiveness, intimidation, and violence.

Chapter Two

"Are you a Wig-splitter?": Contraband Rhetoric and the Internet Carceral-preneur

Uploaded to YouTube on July 29, 2013, the video preview announces the inaugural launch of the web series Fresh Out – Life After the Penitentiary. The opening chords of Curtis Mayfield's "Pusher man" begins to play; a sonic backdrop for a black screen. The song's descending baseline punctuate a rhythmic high-hat rapport. The screen lightens, and a figure performing push-ups comes into focus. His head and his body below the hips are cropped from the picture frame. As the naked torso rises and falls in cadence to the music, the figure's breathing becomes audible, filling in the spaces between the baseline. The high-hat mimics a ticking clock. Despite the push-up's slow ascent and descent, the baseline and percussion seem to goad his pronounced inhalation and exhalation forward. The sounds of breathless running. He sports a crude snake tattoo wrapping its way upward, then around from forearm to bicep. The phrase "don't tread on me" stretches from wrist to elbow. A considerable amount of ink went into the tattoo; the figure is huge. Off camera, a loud metal clamor – presumably a prison cell door opening - is followed by a loud voice barking "Roll'em up!" The figure stops mid-repetition and hops to his feet. Upright and in profile - still framed as an anonymous torso - the figure stretches a t-shirt over his massive arms and chest. Turning forward and facing the camera he tugs and straightens the t-shirt out revealing the words: Fresh Out: Life after the Penitentiary (fig. 4). The image dims, first into grayscale, then slowly to solid black as Mayfield sings: "I'm yo' mama/I'm yo' daddy/I'm that nigga' in the alley…" The video's introduction is followed by a text graphic presenting familiar mass incarceration statistics: "730 out of every 100,000 Americans are in prison. This is the highest incarceration rate in the world."

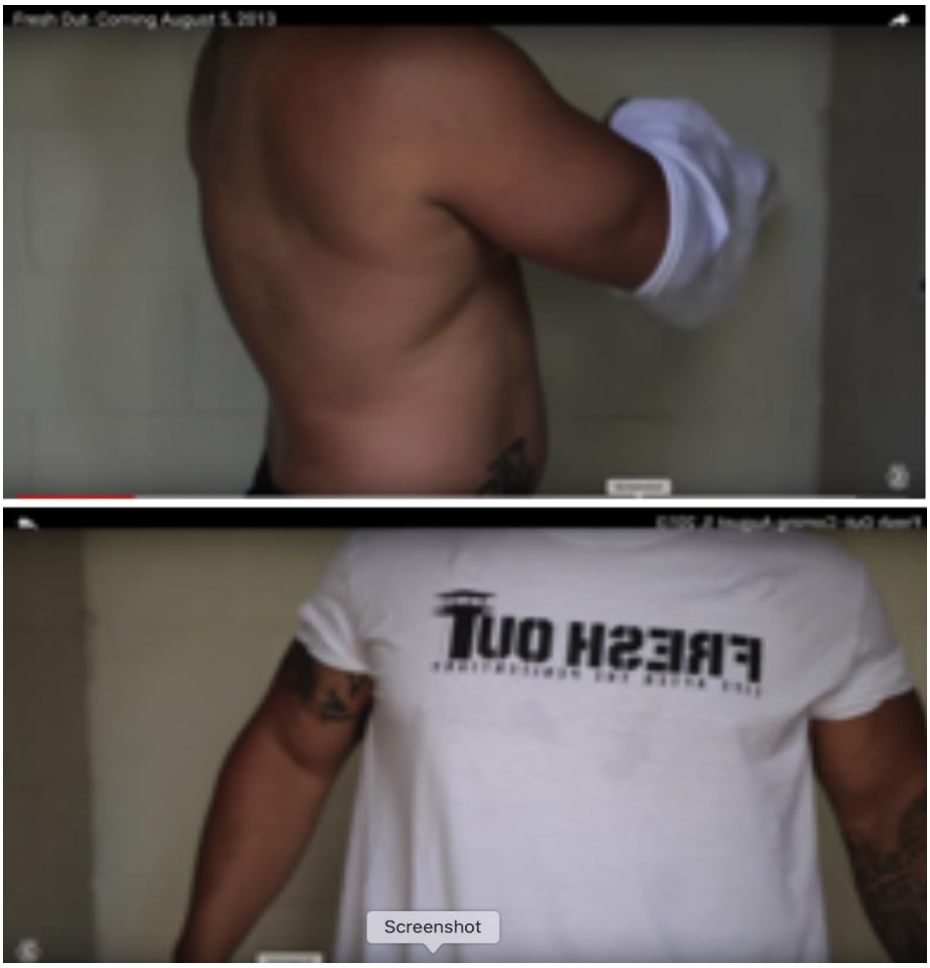

Fig. 4. Opening sequence for Freshout: Life after the Penitentiary promo.

The balance of the clip's 1:47 minute running time features excerpts from interviews of two ex-inmates. A viewer is immediately taken by the visual mass of their prison-yard bodies. The first interviewee, Kali Muscle, recalls his dismay at entering a new "yard" and encountering what he "thought to be females." He continues, "I said, "what's going on? Is this a co-ed yard? What's going on?" He then describes how "this transsexual came out with a knife this long," he holds his hands about 18-20 inches apart, his right curled into a fist pantomiming a knife handle grip, "I'm not exaggerating or nothin', and stabbed this other transsexual. I mean, it looked like it came out his (sic) other side, man."

The next interviewee, Matt Bailey, details an incident in which someone attempts to coerce him into attacking another inmate: “I said, “I ain’t goin’ with you, man.” I said, “I’ll go kick that guy’s ass. I have no reason to kick that guy’s ass. But when I’m done, I’m gonna come back and kick YOUR ass. And I will fuck you up. And don’t even think…I don’t give a shit who you are or who you think you’re runnin.’ You want me to do that for you, then be prepared. Right? ‘Cuz I’m comin’ after you.” The set darkens, then more statistics scroll horizontally across the screen: “Approximately 700,000 are released from prison every year. Two thirds are expected to return to prison within three years. Some make it. Some don’t.” *Freshout*’s logo replace the text. Fade to black. After a beat, Kali Muscle suddenly reappears in the classic bodybuilder’s double bicep flex pose. His eyes wide open and bulging, staring directly at the viewer, as he aggressively shakes his head left and right while roaring. The bellow of a boogeyman (fig. 5).

Fig. 5. Kali Muscle.

A. Building Carceral/Public Community

This chapter offers rhetorical analysis of an ex-convict produced website named The *Freshout Series: Life After the Penitentiary* (FOP). At its core, this investigation turns on the seemingly dichotomous carceral-verses-public focus of the site; whereas its producers promote the site as a kind of public service/educational project, it's self-conscious branding, marketing strategies, and focused cultivation of a fan-base - "honorary" convicts called "Wig-splitters" – mark FOP as a canny translator of its fan's fascination with aberrant masculine culture[13]. Capitalized as such on the website, "prison culture," is repackaged and marketed as a lifestyle. FOP directs a compelling marketing strategy through which a broadly acknowledged "deviant" carceral existence is transformed into a distinctly rehabilitative masculinist lifestyle coveted by the site's "Wig-splitters."

This investigation highlights the website's community-building discursive, visual, and material rhetorics in order to interrogate what potential Wig-splitters are seeking when they patronize FOP's lifestyle products/services. Uncovering the Wig-splitters' attraction to the site is instrumental to understanding FOP's use of contraband rhetoric and, in turn, understanding its calculated presentation of carceral-linked hypermasculinity conflated with mainstream gendered notions of personal growth and wellness. Similar to other web-based lifestyle marketing businesses, FOP's range of products and services are designed to embody its target audiences' desires, aesthetics, and ideals. As a result, the site appeals to its subscribers' sense of an ongoing "crisis of masculinity." More to the point, FOP's lifestyle branding presents as a reimagining

[13] In prison parlance, a "Wig-splitter" is an inmate who handles disputes with violence sufficient enough to split an opponent's head open. The term features prominently on *Freshout*'s website. Significantly, it's also used as an honorific describing the website's community members. in this instance, aspects of the term's original connotations of strength and violence are retained, however, in a demonstration of lifestyle marketing, it's use as a group identifier laudably transforms Wig-splitter into a positive, motivational, and aspirational term.

and shifting of negative connotations traditionally linked to prison culture. For Wig-splitters, carceral culture – without actual imprisonment – exemplifies a distillation of traditional masculinity offered as a rejoinder to sweeping societal changes regarding race, gender, and class. Ultimately, a demonstration of how carceral images become consequential in the world, FOP upends conventional negative conceptions of incarceration by refashioning them into inspirational, motivational, and entrepreneurial ideals that ideologically correspond to contemporary masculinists movement's ideals.

I begin this case study with an overview of FOP's website. I identify its project and principles, and interrogate correspondences among its mission statement, media, products, and services. In so doing, I clarify how the site makes prestigious, and then commodifies, certain aspects of incarceration. Tonally, the site doesn't sugarcoat prison life and culture: felons admit their crimes, offer testimonials of suffering, violence, and deprivation. However, a counter-balancing narrative of ingenuity, courage, self-care, and conviction exposes the misconceptions of carceral experience circulating within the public sphere. My primary consideration here is to interrogate which elements of the site parallel with the contraband while highlighting the ways these elements are indicative of the suasive influence of circulating carceral images.

Freshout Production's (FOP) introductory video is a sly, funky, and sensual coordination of the sonic and the visual: body movements, fade ins and outs, music, and the ambient scene-setting din of clanging metal and echoing voices. It is also a study in rhetorical contrasts: mass incarceration statistical graphics trail its cinematic intro and ultimately closes the video. Textual data summing up the dire consequences of mass incarceration effectively bracket the video's interview excerpts. A viewer can be forgiven for associating the opening sequence with blaxploitation era cinematic cool, not so much for what is depicted, but for the over-all tone of

menace and dispassionate masculine power the intentional trans-racial substitution of black cultural associations; prison themes in FOP are frequently adorned with black cultural productions. In addition to music, black language, dress, and performance correspond to a suite of prison affects intrinsic to prison culture. Further indicative of multilayered signification between notions of external and internal prison culture, the trailing interview excerpts featuring Kali Muscle and Matt Bailey forecasts further conflation of visceral substance, sexual tension, and extreme violence. FOP's arguments and claims equally utilizes ex-convict experience and mainstream fantasy in order to present their reinterpretation of the carceral.

From intro to interviews, FOP's production and editing choices highlight eroticized hypermasculinity, sexual tension/anxiety, and violence within the carceral context. Specifically, our attention is, at once, drawn to the self-consciously sensualized anonymous figure in the intro, shifted from there to grapple with unsettling mass-incarceration statistics, and landing so as to be turned towards our imagined notions of incarceration by Kali Muscle recounting his personal experience of one "transsexual" impaling another with a knife long enough to "come out the other side," i.e., a symbolic reenactment of the perennial trope of prison rape. Ultimately, the creative team behind FOP's branding appear to capitalize on carnal tensions within pop-culture representation and the coarser realities of incarceration. I contend that this tension - marked by pleasurable consumption and documentarian intake of cinematic and firsthand accounts of carceral existence purposefully and persuasively applied - amounts to contraband rhetoric.

The revealing three-part format of FOP's promo video – its stylish, tone-setting opening sequence, graphic interstitials, and interviews of the formerly incarcerated – concisely summarizes website's content and branding. Specifically, FOP delivers on its promo's promise: a project full of well-defined aesthetic of prison-cool woven through with video interviews,

presentations, demos, exposés, and commentary. By project, I mean, on the one hand, its stated goal of informing the general public of the perils and vagaries of incarceration/post-incarceration. On the other hand, I point to the presence of subtler connotations predicated on the site's visual rhetorics as they engage, and are in conflict with, the rhetorics of FOP's interventionist mission statement. More precisely, visual and discursive rhetorical analysis of the promotional video reveals a form of seduction theater highlighting the negatives of prison life while simultaneously offering up visual and textual rhetorics of prestige locked intimately with, and trading on, FOP's cautionary statements.

As a rhetorical compliment, "Pusher man's" narrative of its hero's spectacular rise, tragic fall, and the collateral harm caused to his community as a result of his actions, could be interpreted as cautionary, and thereby in line with FOP's articulated public service mission. However, the "ghetto mythos" of the triumphal (if for a moment) street hustler - capable across social, cultural, and economic strata - has wide cultural cache as a generic trope. Consequently, the promo's music and video production deftly interweave "Pusher man's" narrative, music, and cultural significance with the implied prison narrative of the video's anonymous figure. As a result, the figure becomes the rhetorical embodiment of a carceral subject as interpreted by FOP's creators. A question then arises concerning the central message of the website: why does there appear to be such tension between FOP's declared intervention – a cautionary about the deprivations, trauma, and dehumanization associated with imprisonment - and the video's rhetorical markers of prestige aligned with carcerality?

User participation and community identification are useful gauges for tracking FOP's contraband's eventfulness. Here, I speculate on motives: what socio-political forces compel potential Wig-splitters to identify with prison culture in general, and FOP specifically? In

seeking answers to that question, I correlate high profile male-identity movements and ideologies with prison culture's hypermasculinity fixation. Groups like the Proud Boys, ideologies undergirding involuntary celibate (Incel) beliefs, and alt-right conservatism disseminate a grievance filled rhetoric concerned with a perceived crisis of masculinity. I assert that a circulating sense of a social and political siege on masculinity correlates with site visitor's identification with the unvarnished hypermasculinity central to prison culture displayed on FOP.

The impact and variable meaning of images circulating from one public to another - from carceral space to public sphere – is key to FOP's brand marketing. Consequently, Iconographic Tracking, Laurie Gries' proposed methodology for determining the consequentiality of images as they circulate in the world, will ground this current analysis. As previously stated, Iconographic Tracking analyzes the movement and unanticipated influence of a single image. My contribution to this methodology proceeds by first identifying contraband rhetoric as visual category of rhetoric, which is to say that - instead of tracking the impact of an individual image - I track the consequentiality of a circulating genre of imagery. To that end, FOP's website presents as an excellent example of contraband rhetoric's consequentiality as a conduit through which currently and formerly incarcerated rhetors launch impactful critiques of the criminal justice system specifically, and societal inequities as a whole. Moreover, as demonstrated by the site's ex-convict entrepreneurial focus, reversal of post-carceral socio-economic punishment, i.e. employment discrimination, social stigma and exclusion are equally integral to FOP's social critiques. Collectively, its themes, social, and material productions are contraband rhetoric in that they interrupt and capitalize on the socio-economic punishment tangential to incarceration. Thereby re-tuning carceral stigma into commodifiable lifestyle and product. Along the way, I contend that this inversion of punitive existence meted out to subjects legally and socially

adjudicated as unfit, is positively received by a cadre of disaffected men as an ethos of maladaptive masculinity worthy of celebration.

Classifying elements of FOP as contraband rhetoric - i.e. identifying the site as an "event" born of circulation and consequentiality of carceral images - reminds us to keep the conventions of Christine Sharpe's wake work close to hand. Disparate policing in black spaces, along with juridical bias in conviction and sentencing disproportionately situates black bodies within prison spaces. Contraband, as I've defined it, amalgamates culturally specific historic black forms and practices – themselves historically mediated responses to racial containment – with prison culture. Big Herc and Anthony M. – the site's producers - replicate carcerality as an online social networking experience. In a somewhat ironic turn, FOP's repetition and revision of carceral existence reminds us that it labors within the afterlife – the wake – of American chattel slavery within which "the prison repeats the logics, architectural and otherwise, of the slave ship" (Sharpe 75). As I interrogate the ways popular notions of carcerality circulate adjunct to prisoner produced images, the tenets of wake work – recognition of black creative responses to racialized containment in the afterlife of slavery – help to decode the ways FOP exemplifies contraband rhetorical practices/contraband rhetoric.

FOP's affordances to its public - carceral knowledge and identification, prison related commodities, carceral spectacle as entertainment - are familiar to practitioners of wake work as transactional and commodifiable expressions of "slavery's continued unfolding…constitutive of the contemporary conditions of spatial, legal, psychic, and material dimensions of Black non/being as well as Black aesthetic and other modes of deformation and interruption" (Sharpe 20). In other words, as former inhabitants - and articulate survivors[14] - of carceral containment,

[14] I borrow the term articulate survivor from Robert Stepto's important wake work From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative. Through analysis of classic African-American Slave autobiographies, Stepto locates a

Big Herc and Anthony M. reconstitute, with variation, the conditions of racial subjection and radical institutionalized containment. Moving forward, I analyze the website's content and formal elements in order to identify sub-textual contraband components. During this process, I seek to make sense of the way inmate/former inmate and prison related images flow throughout FOP as relational points of meaning and identification. By relational points of meaning and identification, I posit dual-themed rhetorical events denoting (amongst other things) common mainstream conceptions of carceral life sub-textually freighted with contraband rhetoric. Stated differently- prison - commonly identified as a punitive site to warehouse the maladjusted, transforms into a space and culture of identification for disillusioned non-incarcerated masculinist. This definition is predicated on the inversive property of contraband rhetoric; aware of their own civic and social unfitness, the contraband rhetor positions themselves as a locus of prurient curiosity and public fascination. This performance of unrepentant deviance and masculinity serves as a beacon, drawing attention from the cluster of online male identity groups recognized collectively as the Manosphere.[15]

distinctive pattern endemic to black cultural narratives in general. He identifies two fundamental symbolic narrative expressions: ascent and immersion. Briefly, the ascent narrative details the protagonist's life in bondage, their yearning for literacy, subsequent awareness of their condition, escape and ultimate alienation in freedom. The narrative of immersion describes their return to the place of origin, along repatriation with their community. This reunion requires reeducation in "tribal literacy," i.e. re-learning the cultural codes of their community of origin. At this point, the protagonist assumes the role of "articulate kinsman." Correspondingly, the ascent portion of the narrative finds the protagonist transformed: "[t]he ascent narrative conventionally ends with the questing figure situated in the least oppressive social structure afforded by the world of the narrative, and free in the sense that he or she has gained sufficient literacy to assume the mantle of articulate survivor. As the phrase "articulate survivor" suggests, the hero or heroine of an ascent narrative must be willing to forsake familial and communal postures in the narrative's most oppressive social structure for a new posture in the least oppressive environment--at best, one of solitude; at worst, one of alienation" (167). For Stepto slave narratives are the pre-generic African-American narrative model. Big Herc's and Anthony M.'s symbolic journey from the symbolic hostile South (penitentiary), to freedom in the "less hostile" symbolic North positions them as articulate survivors capable of telling their stories about captivity, while still suffering alienation because of the stigma of incarceration.

[15] This form of mediated identification has been labeled para-social interaction and it "describe[s] ways in which audience members connect, emotionally and cognitively, with images of people they see and hear through mass media, and can be collectively called mediated relationships" (224 Nabi, Oliver). See also Cohen; Schiappa

B. *Freshout Productions* Website

FOP is a web platform crafted by a creative team comprised of two self-described "ex-cons," Marcus "Big Herc" Timmons and Anthony M. The site's formal elements and their interrelation with CR will be my analytic starting point. To that end, I follow prompts featured on the highly cinematic and pop culture informed homepage. Labeled: Watch Originals, Commissary, Merch-labs, Consulting and the Mastermind Series, these prompts navigate a site visitor not only through different parts of the website, but also reveal a rhetorical thematic grounded in prison related cinematic spectacle, narrative, material vicariousness, and social identification. Collectively, the links constitutes a rhetorical summation that underscores the visiting public's voyeuristic desire for penitentiaries and their current/former occupants. FOP quenches this desire with first hand description; what is an inmate's daily routine; instruction: how to navigate prison politics; and narrative: an ex-inmate's tale of exoneration through self-advocacy. Whereas the entertainment function of these elements is forthrightly acknowledged by their intentional foregrounding, FOP nevertheless takes additional strides to reinforce its public's desired identification with carcerality. Implied fraternal bounding, access to prison related commodities, and a shared skepticism of contemporary gender politics fortify the internal/external carceral dynamic. A site visitor landing on the homepage becomes acquainted with the FOP's creators, as well as their stated purpose for creating the website:

> *Fresh Out: Life After the Penitentiary* was created by Marcus "Big Herc" Timmons and Anthony M, two ex-cons who want to share what life is really like for people in prison and after being released. Our mission is to educate the public, at-risk youth, and friends and family of incarcerated men and women about the brutal realities of prison life, and to strip

> away the inaccuracies, downright falsehoods, and even glamor associated with it in the media and on the streets.

After highlighting their educational mission, the hosts continue by summarizing the negative depth, reach, and consequence of mass incarceration. Afterward, they inject a call for empathy for those entwined in the carceral system. Asserting that their personal experiences with incarceration positions them as mediators properly situated in between the free and contained worlds, FOP's producers declare: "The knowledge that we share can save lives" considering the lack of a "handbook on how to conduct oneself in prison," adding finally, "being ignorant of the unwritten rules and expectations can place first-timers in potentially deadly situations." The gravitas of the final statement sets a menacing tone permeating the majority of the site's offerings. Each installment, irrespective of theme, is freighted with ambient precarity, i.e., this information that will save life and limb, but only if you listen. Another notable feature is its coverage of broad aspects of prison life and culture from an insider's perspective. Featuring interviews with a varied range of ex-prisoners, the corrections-impacted, former prison employees, and others, FOP offers its viewership testimonials and firsthand accounts revealing a breadth of carceral experience extending well beyond mainstream conceptions and expectations.

A great deal of FOP's content confirms its support for those impacted by the corrections system. However, its deployment of contraband rhetoric valorizes carceral informed attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions – one may call the whole of which contraband practices[16] - as legitimate counter-responses to mainstream values, attitudes, and restrictions. In other words, one can acknowledge FOP's declarations in support of the formerly incarcerated, while also

[16] As a reminder: The contraband conceived as such has two subsets: rhetoric and practice. Contraband Practices are the inmate's tactics and motivations undergirding the production and circulation of carceral images and videos.

observing that its various discourses, visual elements, and marketing amount to online community building through common identification with carceral existence. Stated differently, as implicated in its narratives, exchanges, and marketing, FOP caters to the public's prurient appetite for things prison related. Rhetorical indicators such as contradictory narratives surrounding the negative social costs of incarceration and a shifting - from ex-inmate to mainstream public – narrative focus, demonstrates FOP's shrewd use of contraband rhetoric's marketing appeal along registers of affect and masculinist's domination fantasy.

FOPs homepage is a sophisticated, media savvy portal into carceral phenomena. I choose the term carceral phenomena to underscore how the homepage renders the idea of incarceration along several different registers. The sites' educational project, for example, direct audience attention towards the more tangible aspects of imprisonment. To that end, the homepage offers statistics and snippets from interviews detailing the material effects of mass incarceration. Popular media inform a great deal of the public's conception of incarceration. Accordingly, someone landing on FOP's homepage is met immediately by a rapid paced montage of music and images that allude to prison cinema, documentaries, and music videos. For example, the site video preview spins a rapid montage, backed by hip-hop music, of inmates throwing gang signs, baring tattoos, cool-pose performances, and acts of violence edited for dramatic effect.

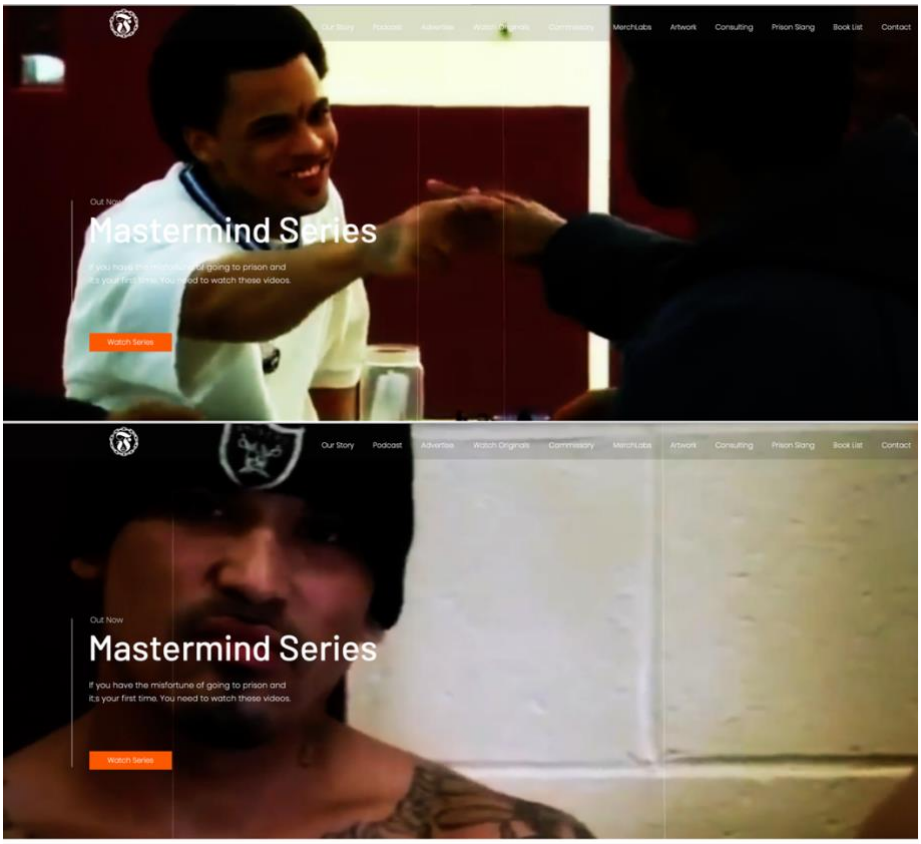

Fig. 6. Still from *Freshout: Life After the Penitentiary* Homepage

Although most of the subjects depicted in the videos are prisoners, their bearing, appearance, and behavior do not skew towards abjection; in what turns into a type of lifestyle marketing, FOP's homepage flits from stylistic urban/hip hop influenced masculinity performances to clips of masculine bonding in ex-inmate interviews, featuring for instance, mutual-affirmation, fraternal language, post-carceral support, and validation of their shared experiences. Finally, Big Herc's consulting and Mastermind Series – services ostensibly targeted to site visitors facing imminent confinement – insinuate that socially prestigious aspects of carcerality are purchasable and attainable through experienced counseling. FOP recognizes mass-incarceration as the social ill that it is. FOP's educational outreach, consisting of conventional, publicly accessible resources, in addition to ex-inmate testimony, appear to be good-faith advocacy. However, its popular

culture allusions, lifestyle marketing, and products/services amount to contraband inversion in which incarceration's negative associations turn positive, desirable, consumable, and profitable.

By presenting the intricacies of carceral experience, FOP manages to complicate persistent mainstream and popular culture tropes that radically condense carceral experience to the most salacious elements of the pains of incarceration. Whereas cinematic[17] and other pop-culture depictions have largely skewed the public's imaginary towards the extreme violence, degradation, and sexual-assault that often accompany incarceration, FOP expands upon such depictions, thereby surprising its viewership with incarcerations quotidian truths: extreme boredom, often coerced community building, mental and physical self-improvement/survival regimens, the manufacture of tools and appliances, and even sharing recipes. In short, while FOP does not deny its public prison life's prurient and disturbing aspects – in fact, it depends on such features to draw viewers – it nevertheless counters mainstream expectations by representing inmates as intelligent, adaptive, self-reflective, politically engaged, and often, deeply philosophical. In this sense, FOP enacts contraband rhetoric if only in the sense that contraband rhetoric is a performative and rhetorical refutation of the public's imagining of the abject incarcerated body. This refutation starts with FOP's insider knowledge of the inner workings of prison life. For the mainstream, prison is a black box into which a vast array of ideas concerning criminality, retributive punishment, race, and justice are deposited. FOP is the public's guide to into that black box wherein the truth of prison life is presented in opposition to the fantasy.

Produced by former inmates, the videos are themselves a consequence of the distribution and circulation of prison images and carceral spectacle. Of course, images and carceral spectacle

[17] A considerable body of cinematic media scholarship has looked at dramatizations of prison life. The fact that film, television, and media representations of prison life largely inform public understanding of carceral existence is a common analytical starting point. (Bennet; Mason; Wilson, O'Sullivan)

pre-dates the viral circulation of prisoner produced images. Taking this history and social significance into account, it can be argued that the producers of FOP have expanded the public specular market for the carceral. By public specular market for the carceral, I refer back to popular culture depictions of carceral life from fictionalized media representations like the movie Penitentiary, prison series like Oz, and Breakout. Partner to these fictionalized prison stories are documentaries Scared Straight! and its reality show spinoffs. Prison/inmate life, judged solely by its projection onto public screens and imagination betray a public curiosity that goes beyond simple cries for safety and justice.

C. Lifestyle Branding

A fundamental feature of FOP is its marketing of prison culture, behavioral codes, and social mores as valuable proficiencies translatable into mainstream self-improvement regimens of success and prestige. In video entitled "Can Ex-Cons be Entrepreneurs," Herc recites a basic rehabilitative formula: "…the bottom line is you got to take those skills that you learn being illegal and just make them legal." He offers himself by example; he recounts that during lockup, there was plenty of time to mentally revisit his past illegal activities and re-envision them as entrepreneurial skills and aptitudes. He studied business, self-improvement, and motivational texts, a number of which he includes on the FOP booklist; Tony Robbins' *Awaken the Giant Within*, Napoleon Hill's *Think and Grow Rich!,* and Robert Greene's *48 Laws of Power*. Herc's entrepreneurial bootstrap philosophy, echoing self-help and motivational texts recommended to his aspirational viewers, does not directly constitute contraband rhetoric. In fact, his advice to take illegal skills and make them legal obscures elements, more accurately identified as contraband, embedded in the site's self-realization, motivational, and entrepreneurial project.

The directly contraband allows for deviance and is exemplified by divergence away from conventional mainstream values and appearances.

In another one of his motivational videos entitled, "Hit it with some Crackhead Tenacity," Big Herc's presents a purer contraband perspective the describes how an ex-con can attain success in the outside world. Here, he spots a deviant figure, aligns the figure in the carceral context, and finally spins the hapless figure into a motivational model for FOP's audience. The video begins with Big Herc driving down an urban street. He brings our attention to gaunt, shirtless man, walking with jerky, uncoordinated movements to a makeshift shelter on a corner. Big Herc surmises the mans is high on crack cocaine. Driving past the shirtless man, Herc looks into the camera to make a surprising claim: "Now this, you guys, is what they would call a shot-caller[18] in the pen. A guy like this, on drugs [and] chasing drugs. That's the misconception. He won't be able to make it on the street, because he's 5150.[19] But in prison [he would be] thriving. That's a damn shame, man…stay the hell out of prison." Herc seems to argue that the piteous figure has two impediments to his potential success: mental illness and, surprisingly, his not being incarcerated, thereby missing his chance to be a prison boss. However, Herc's final statements, "that's a damn shame" and "stay the hell out of prison," contrasts with the statements preceding them. Herc seems to suggest at first, that it's a shame that the man isn't incarcerated because in prison he'd be "thriving." However, his final statement, "stay the hell out of prison," complicates the meaning of his entire observation. This contradictory statement embodies the tension at play in FOP's stated mission and philosophy: whereas on the one hand,

[18] In an article entitled "5 Leadership Lessons CEOs Can Learn from Prison Shot Callers," self-identified ex-convict and entrepreneur Andrew Medal, describes a shot-caller: "a shot caller, generally speaking, is the top leader in a prison system. Specifically, the shot caller is an inmate who, as so aptly named, calls the shots" (Medal).

[19] 5150 is the Orange County, CA Welfare and Institutions Code number for involuntary detention for psychiatric evaluation.

it condemns mass incarceration and its adverse impact on society, on the other, it links value and constructive qualities to incarceration. This somewhat unresolved tension is contraband rhetoric because imprisonment is presented as both generative and destructive. Big Herc continues:

> "a lot of people were kind of blown away by the comment. They said, "what do you mean [he'd] be a shot-caller in the pen? And what I tell people is…you don't ever want to go to prison. But, what I mean by being a shot-caller is this guy on the street is extremely addicted to drugs. He's smoked out of his mind or tweaked out of his mind. He gets to prison, he cleans up. He's still a drug addict 'cuz he hadn't decided to stop doing drugs. Now, because he's been so mentally prepped for how to acquire drugs on the street […] As he gets involved in the drug trade [in prison], he becomes a prominent person […] and he eventually becomes a shot-caller."

It appears that, when Herc predicts the man would "clean up" in prison, he means just that: prison culture and protocol would require him to maintain a clean and neat appearance; another example of imprisonment fostering a semblance of the personal positive. By detailing the drug addicted, soon-to-be-prison-kingpin's hypothetical rise in the penitentiary to his audience, Herc argues that a drug addict's tenacity and intelligence are qualities to be emulated by ambitious Wig-splitters: "people always ask me how to become entrepreneurs or business people…you gotta really want it, and put the time into it." Here, he circles back to his initial observation, "the same thing like that guy on the street, that drug addict who was out there tweaked the hell out…if you can take that energy […] that you used to put into getting high or doing things of a negative nature, into something productive, you could run a corporation." Big Herc's presentation exposes the compelling intersection between deviant carceral and conventional mainstream ideals tied to self-improvement and personal success. In addition to being a

fundamental association FOP uses to great effect as contraband rhetoric, such personal growth and motivational coaching is also a draw for a specific type of site subscriber.

D. Are You A Wig-splitter?

FOP's contraband rhetoric transforms site visitors into Wig-splitters by offering up a symbolic solution to a perceived crisis of masculinity. Imbued with masculinist semiotics - combined with discourses of domination, stoicism, and violence - its carceral imagery offers an extreme reiteration of traditional conceptions of masculinity that appeal to male site subscribers. Moreover, the site's visual and textual discourses reify patriarchal heteronormativity by celebrating sexual conquest, traditional gender roles, and centering men as the rightful bearer of power and authority. Finally, FOP features commentary documenting inmate resistance to prison officials and procedures. While this study cannot make definitive claims about user-motivation, it can make use of subscriber comments and responses to topical videos. Analysis of subscriber comments reveal a preoccupation with a perceived siege on traditional masculinity accompanied by government incursion on individual rights, an anxiety shared with political masculinist identity movements within the Manosphere such as the Proud Boys and Involuntary Celibates (Patterson and Elliott 2002, 235). FOP subscribers from the Manosphere bond over angst, suspicion, and feelings of persecution and build supportive male-centered communities with a common identification as Wig-splitters.

My first example comes from a FOP video entitled "Don't get P-Whipped." This series of videos feature Big Herc offering personal insight on a variety of topics. Here, he admonishes men to not cede control to domineering women. He begins, "what I mean by p-whipped is a lot of these guys out here…no longer have a backbone," the necessity of which is "one of the

foundational pillars of a family structure." He continues by lamenting the state of contemporary masculinity, arguing that many men have been raised by women and, as a consequence, has been socialized into feminine attributes. For Big Herc, this phenomenon is not a chance occurrence, "[if] you take away the backbone of the man and the family falls apart and the trick has been the whole time is to collapse that family structure so that it could be more easily manipulated." He proceeds to argue that governmental and or institutional forces are programmatically feminizing men in order to control the population. During this process, as men become "weaker," women become stronger, primarily through public assistance and government subsidies. Subsequently, traditional gender roles are reversed to catastrophic effect. Big Herc concludes the video by advising his viewers to wake up to this conspiracy and reclaim their masculinity by "having a backbone." His rhetoric of systemic emasculation and feminization of society may, on one hand, be attributed to his adoption of hyper-masculine prison codes and behaviors. On the other hand, these same perceptions of a gender-based societal revolution in which men are vilified and pushed to the margins, circulate a network of online masculinist communities in the "Manosphere."

It appears many FOP subscribers come from the Manosphere, an assortment of websites, blogs, and online forums united in the belief that men are victims of an increasingly femicentric society. Comprised of groups and movements like Men Going their Own Way, Incels (Involuntary Celibates), Men's Rights Movement, and Pick-up Artistry, the group's binding ideology is the promotion of masculinity, disdain for women, and rejection of feminism. As each group within the network has its own agenda, there are varying levels of commitment to the core ideology, ranging from conventional activism for fathers' rights to extreme violence committed by Incels against women.

Comments below the “Don't get P-Whipped” video suggests that some aspiring Wig-splitters are drawn to FOP because its ideologies match those of the Manosphere.[20] The Manosphere is a loose network of organizations, blogs, forums, web-communities, and subcultures ideologically aligned by male grievance. The primary branches of the Manosphere are the Men’s Rights Movement, Pick-up Artistry, and subcultural trolling communities (Jane). In general, these groups promote exaggerated forms of masculinity, opposition to feminism, hostility towards women, and an overall sense of victimization because of perceived systemic misandry. An important development concerning the reach of these masculinist ideologies is their adoption by men not directly associated with specific groups in the Manosphere (Jane 7).

Taking such into consideration, FOP’s unambiguously male-focused carceral rhetoric celebrating power, dominance, and traditionally defined gender traits readily align with Manosphere ideologies. These shared beliefs appear in comments that exposing a vast conspiracy to undermine the American family through the erasure of traditional masculinity:

> “[N]ice video. it's true, they're doing their best to collapse the family structure. you see the propaganda coming at you in all forms of media, the dad is always portrayed as a bumbling weak idiot, promoting castration (IE transgenderism), referring to any kind of masculinity as 'toxic'. and on the flipside they wanna promote promiscuity in females as 'empowering'. they want a pacified population, male and female, who only want to consume, buy, spend money on things they don’t need.”

Other viewers echo the same conspiracy angle, in particular the idea that bad actors collude with powerful corporations and government agencies to functionally change realty. Like the schemes detailed above, women are its perceived beneficiaries. American society (and in particular men),

[20] All comments are transcribed exactly as written.

they believe, have become so inured to this situation that they are effectively brainwashed. The curative for this brainwashing is for men to face the reality of their marginalization. The mechanism for regaining a true sense of social reality is a concept central to Manosphere ideology, "Red Pill:"

> "It's time for all men to take the "Red Pill". If you don't know what I mean, then look it up. Do your research."

"Red Pill" is an allusion to the 1999 film *The Matrix*, in which the protagonist Neo is given a choice between taking a blue or red pill. Swallowing the blue pill results in living a delusional programmed existence; taking the red pill leads to an enlightened awareness of harsh reality. Manosphere ideology proports to be the Red Pill; it awakens men to the siege on masculinity and the institutionalized feminization of American society. A responder to the previous red pill comment laments:

> "Many will look it up, and many from that group will disregard it as "misogynistic" or promoting "toxic masculinity," but will go right back to the red pill playbook once a woman slices his balls off and reduces him to the spineless mangina he's ALLOWED himself to become."

All of these responses reflect rage and suspicion, while also flagging their speakers as angry, grudge-filled men flocking to FOP in search of solidarity and community. Still another commenter uses terminology commonly deployed by the Incels: alpha and beta. For Incels, American society is unfairly structured to privilege women. As a result, masculine value is predicated on one's ability to attract women:[21] The following commenter takes Big Herc to task by chiding him for using his own alpha privilege to condescend to betas.

[21] Alpha men are able to attract women through superficial means like, attractiveness, affluence, and popularity. Betas are men lacking the physical and social attributes of Alphas and are therefore unsuccessful with women.

> "I'm in a funny place. On one hand, videos like this are needed. On the other hand, I'm beginning to hate them because you're standing in front of the camera saying shit that some MEN out here are dealing with and they overcame. And they didn't need to go to prison for it. You got men out here who did REAL HARD SHIT, like not resort to crime and getting things the easy way like stealing. They kept at it, for themselves, for their mothers, fathers and their families. These same men are able to get whatever pussy they want, because they are straight up alpha and the woman sees it. Wtf is pussy whipped to anyone but a fuckboy? Cmon man, if you ain't beta, don't be sitting in front of the camera talking hard about such a shitty topic."

The subscriber argues that women of substance can see hardworking, responsible betas for the alphas they actually are. Here, the subscriber betrays Incels' disdain for alphas, but also an obsession with all things masculine, hence his membership with FOP.

In another video entitled "We WARNED you - Are You Listening Now?", Big Herc analyzes the perfect storm of the COVID pandemic, police shootings, protest violence, and the Black Lives Matter Movement activism. Herc sees a deep conspiracy at the root these events. A conspiracy with all of the earmarks of government overreach and the incremental installment of marital law. The thin line separating the prison world and the outside world is a perpetual theme in FOP interviews. For Herc, strong-arm official responses to demonstrators, as well as the governments' handling of the COVID pandemic are comparable to suppression and disinformation techniques used in prison:

Identifying as betas, Incels believe that their superior qualities are ignored by women because of their shallowness. The Incel community is known for online misogynistic hate speech and real-world attacks on women (Jaki, et al.).

> "It's the same tactics the same game and what these people are doing is nothing new. As you can see what's transpiring across the country, with the riots, with the injustice […] none of this makes sense […] I've seen these same chess moves being played out in the penitentiary. Officers in the pen will put shanks on the yard for a riot […]. Look at Minneapolis! Walk by the court building, there was a stack of bricks there! just a stack of bricks! There was no construction going on, no road work going on, just conveniently somebody left a stack of bricks!"

He goes on to say that in a penitentiary, whenever the CO's wanted to assert authority, they would put rival groups together with the intention of generating conflict. Once a fight happens, he argues, the officials have license to use whatever force needed to squelch the conflict. Herc insinuates that government and the wealthy corporations are constantly launching distractions, like COVID -19, "race riots," and the benighted upcoming election, in order to advance their agendas. For Herc, it is all interrelated and by design, including his personal experience with YouTube suppressing FOP's reach. Questioning a sharp decline in FOP's subscriptions, Herc states, "we were on our way to having a million subscribers and now we have been stuck at 408 for over 8 months," He contends that his pages' demonetizing is the result of the site's advocacy, truth-telling, and "creating a consciousness movement." Instead of generative prison related sites, he asserts YouTube prefers to lend support to other prison-related channels that depict the worst stereotypes of incarceration and focus on violence solely for audience entertainment. Several responders agreed, first recognizing the good FOP does, and then concurring with Herc's argument about YouTube's motives:

> "Im a ex-felon, I made my mistakes. All I talked about is responsibility and accountability for decisions I made. People that like to blame their circumstances on

> others don't like to hear they need to take responsibility for their own actions. It's a liberal way of thinking and YouTube is left-leaning AF. That's why [your] subscribers haven't moved. You sound Republican."

This statement, and many that follow, lament the persecution of sites ideologically committed to presenting masculinity models that appeal to men recognizing a crisis in masculinity. If society has placed restrictions on harmful masculine traits, a less restrictive version of masculinity - one that valorizes socially regressive masculine behavior like aggression, domination might become more appealing. Visually, carceral masculinity emphasizes exaggeration of masculine traits with outsized heavily muscled bodies, accompanied by stoic affect, and the potential of explosive violence. Wig-splitters, in the contemporary context, are looking for such ideals. Further, FOP's audiences' identification as Wig-splitters - i.e. consciously underwriting and accepting social values developed as contingency to lives of state-sanctioned deprivation – warrant attention as a material world phenomenon catalyzed by circulation of carceral images.[22] By offering prison culture in counterpoint to mainstream notions of the social and cultural spectrum of masculinity. In turn, its members, going beyond the educational goals of the site, look to the site's representations of prison culture as a rehabilitative model for contemporary masculinity perceived as under siege.

[22] The question of intentionality – whether FOP's producers were calculated in drawing together a public for narrowly specific end. Following Gries, I contend that FOP's images labor in transformative ways independent of their producer's intent. In other words, the artifact's rhetorical power and potential to become consequential is a factor of social forces and human desires. With respect to iconographic tracking, Gries argues, "this approach advocates for conducting empirical research to make transparent what happens to not only a singular image but also the people and other entities it encounters… The intuitions, desires, and abstract and concrete inspirations driving an image's rhetorical productions are already in flow and must be acknowledged in order to account for an image's eventfulness (Gries 337). Consequently, it can be argued that the nexus of forces underpinning the advent of mass incarceration, thereby catalyzing contraband rhetoric, are the same forces informing the perception of a crisis of masculinity. A continuity of imagistic rhetoric featuring idealized and unfettered masculinity appear between carceral images and, for example, Alt-right representations of ideal masculinity unencumbered by societal restrictions due to demographic, legislative, and social shifts.

An important component to carceral culture begins with the imperative of protecting one's masculinity at all costs. Masculinity in this sense is defined by carceral literacy, i.e. learning to read the codes of the hostile environment around you. Masculinity, in this context is regularly tested and failure is devastating. Carceral masculinity shores up its protections physically, mentally, and socially. The array of carceral images and interviews depicting the brutal realities of prison existence – in general the struggle to survive, but specifically the imperative to preserve one's manhood – substantiates public perceptions of prisons as vicious primal spaces within which might makes right. Prison culture perceived as such readily aligns with contemporary masculinist's ideologies.

E. Purchasable Carcerality

This section talks about carcerality as a desirable, purchasable, and consumable product. This conception of incarceration aligns with popular attraction to carceral media, and the offering of carceral culture as a motivational/entrepreneurial mode. As discussed above, in order to disseminate its message and pick up followers FOP takes advantage of both: it attracts subscriber's through claims of authenticity as a result of it having ex-convicts at its helm. However, the site also edits its video content so as to reflect popular media allusions to prison life. In effect, FOP strikes a balance between fact and fantasy in a bid to appeal to its audience's pop culture sensibilities and curiosity with authentic content. Another draw for site visitors is the messages of self-improvement and motivation. Big Herc hosts a large cache of video with the theme of self-improvement, self-determination, and entrepreneurship. By and large, their intended audience are not ex-convicts, but fans of prison culture. Consequently, there is a value

Fig.7. Commissary/Merch Labs Page.

placed carceral culture partly by way of vicarious experience and also a value placed on emulating values and practices presumed associated with prison culture. The popularity of his motivational videos provide evidence that his audience recognizes a positive model in for self-realization within the carceral. The site's pop-culture atmosphere serves as an exciting marketing draw, the motivational and self-improvement content provides a more substantive means of identifying with the carceral, and finally, FOP's products and services makes certain aspects of carcerality commodities available for purchase.

FOP offers various prison related items to sell under its Commissary/Merch-lab link. Other FOP marketplace sites are "members only" video content and service offerings for site visitors who are about to be incarcerated. Commissary items emulate prison clothing and supplies, the site location is named "commissary" because purchasing items here is a vicarious act of gathering up prison "necessities" (fig. 7). In this case, necessities are nutritional powders and supplements, virality enhancers, and workout manuals, hats, socks, and footwear. Merch-lab consists of t-shirts featuring *Fresh Out's* logo, banner head, and the terms "Wig-splitter" and "Cheekbuster." The difference between Commissary and Merch-lab is that items in the

Commissary represents “purchasable” carceral experience and the Merch-lab can be properly defined as a store for fans of the site.

Wearable merchandise in the Commissary mimic prison issue clothing. These include beanies, hats, socks, athletic shoes and slip-ons. These products offer a purchasable form of carceral identity. In other words, merchandise offers the “prestige” of carceral association without suffering the pains of actual imprisonment. Prestige in this sense, is registered in the faux-prison issue items formal elements: the fit, color, material, and markings signal symbolic association corrections institutions and culture. The brand marker “Wig-splitter” emblazoned on each product is the rhetorical bridge linking actual carceral experience and knowledge and the items social/commodity value. Consequently, Wig-splitter emblazoned across these items suggests triumph over institutionalization. A wearer will have, in one gesture, purchased a faux history of carceral experience, along with implications having had discipline, might, and personal integrity to survive incarceration fully intact (fig. 8).

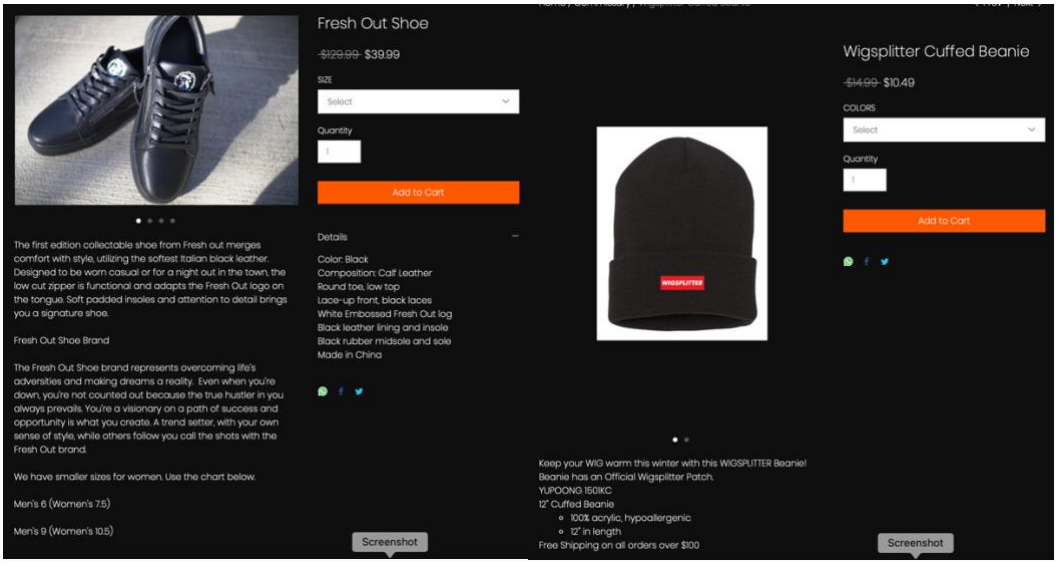

Fig. 8. Prison-Themed Wearable Commissary Products.

The other commissary items are products related to physical well-being, and interesting in that they translate prison-related ideas about the body into the mainstream (fig. 9). One item, Man in the Can Protein Powder, is advertised:

> PRISON BUFF, WITHOUT THE PRISON!
>
> BEHIND PRISON WALLS THEY CALL PROTEIN POWDER MAN IN THE CAN. IF YOU COULD AFFORD TO HAVE IT IN YOUR LOCKER, FELLOW INMATES KNEW YOU WERE ABOUT YOUR SWOL

The header "prison buff, without the prison" encapsulates FOPs marketing strategy: the attainment of valued carceral attributes without the containment. Language in the advertisement promises to do just that by centering the idea of Man in a Can behind prison walls while implying its high worth outside, leaving visitors to ponder in the product's affordances: its material potential and social value of cultivating the large physique typically developed during imprisonment –as well as the prestige at being identified as someone who has endured and prospered under incarceration.

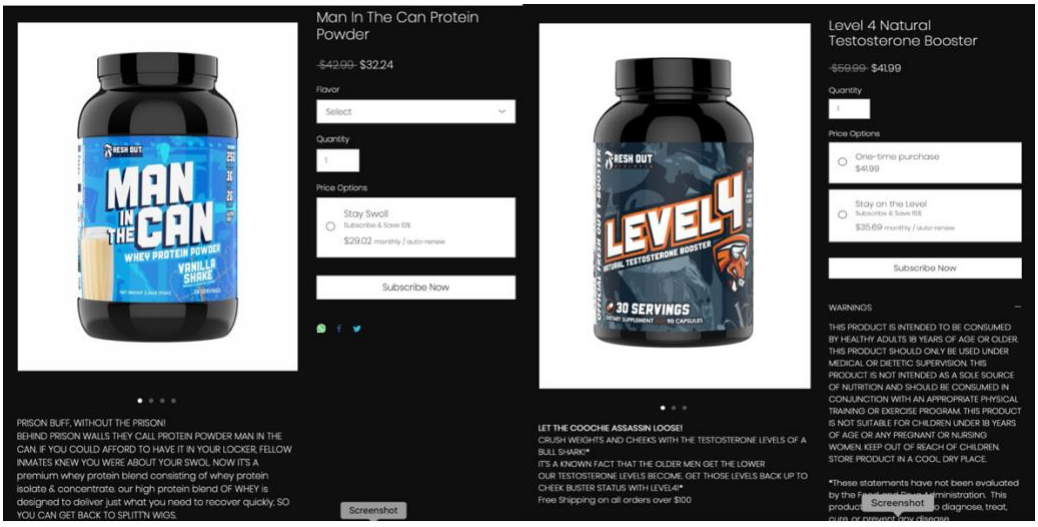

Fig. 9. Health and Wellness Commissary Products

Another dietary supplement called Yard Time makes a humorous reference to prison culture by linking the products flavors to a prisoner-made alcoholic beverage called pruno:

> New Grape Pruno Flavor Now Available!!
>
> Tropical Pruno (pineapple mango flavor)
>
> Candy Pruno (watermelon flavor)
>
> Yard Time is a hard-hitting pre-workout designed to give you just what you need to kill your workouts! Whether it's burpees or weights, Yard Time can help you through it.

Unlike Man in a Can, Yard Time doesn't offer the possibility of its consumer's physical embodiment of carcerality by becoming "swol," i.e., become physically larger through weightlifting exercises. Rather, its name and marketing provide the type of trivial information to augment a Wig-splitter's carceral knowledge-base.

The final supplement is called Level 4 and is advertised as a natural testosterone booster:

> LET THE COOCHIE ASSASSIN LOOSE!
>
> CRUSH WEIGHTS AND CHEEKS WITH THE TESTOSTERONE LEVELS OF A BULL SHARK!
>
> IT'S A KNOWN FACT THAT THE OLDER MEN GET THE LOWER
>
> OUR TESTOSTERONE LEVELS BECOME. GET THOSE LEVELS BACK UP TO CHEEK BUSTER STATUS WITH LEVEL 4!

As with the other supplements, this product connects prison culture with the idealization of physical fitness, appearance, and virility. Level 4, however, offers more: sexual prowess and dominance, appealing to site visitors holding Manosphere beliefs concerning the feminization and emasculation of contemporary men. By offering sex, dominance, power, and carceral masculinity to a section of society reckoning with gender and sexuality inequality (the fruits of

which masculinists decry as misandryist), the perceived deviance associated with male carceral culture offers a ready association for masculinists' own sense of deviance in a society attuned to gender/sexuality politics. FOP's marketing epitomizes and celebrates the powerful Manosphere currency of glorifying "regressive" masculinity traits. Man in a Can, Yard Time, and Level 4 are all products whose symbolic meaning adds precious value to the Wig-splitter's self-perception.

F. Consulting/Mastermind Series

The mastermind series is twelve videos featuring Big Herc offering a video "instructional manual" for site visitors facing imprisonment for the first time. The videos average 12 mins in length and are available behind a paywall for $100.00 a piece. Topics range from "Avoid Bullshit," "Mail Call," "Prison Grievances," "How to take a Shower," etc. The consulting link offers a 30-minute counseling session for $100.00 as well:

> If you find yourself about to do time or if you need motivational coaching get your appointment set up with Big Herc. This offer includes a 30-minute phone call with Big Herc.

Consulting and Mastermind Series are the only resources on FOP that allows for direct engagement with Herc that is specifically concerned with the inevitability of incarceration. Other features of the site are interviews, testimonials, and Herc's prison talk videos that are opinion pieces, motivational, or commentary on current events. These two services provide instructions on "how to jail," a concept contradicted in myriad other videos and statements on the website; learning your way around prison, learning how to survive is something that has be obtained in real time. FOP's mission statement mentions that there is "there is no handbook on how to conduct oneself in prison, and being ignorant of the unwritten rules and expectations can place

first-timers in potentially deadly situations. The knowledge that we share can save lives." Taking FOP's overall transformational message – a message predicted on taking tenets of prison culture as virtues – the cautionary tone of the mission statement seems to deflate the promises of Consulting and Mastermind Series. Both service's sideways acknowledgment of the raw reality of carceral life cuts through the fantasy condoned by the site. The website offers 822 free videos that purport to tell the truth about incarceration and prison culture. While none of them overtly suggest that Wig-splitters should deliberately do prison time in order to experience it first hand, the implications are that attributes developed inside can make one exceptional. However, the twelve pay-walled videos seem to offer something that its eight hundred plus counterparts don't. Unvarnished and stripped of fantasy, the carceral experience mediated in consulting and Mastermind Series is one aligned more with fear and apprehension as opposed to the contraband transformations the site's videos and products seem to offer.

Fresh Out Production's origin statement offers analytic access into the site's carceral informed textual, visual, and material rhetorics that are at once in concordance with the site's stated interventionist project while not incongruently revealing social, popular culture, market, and masculinist capital associated with the "prison- life" mythos. I offer that there is no conflict in Fresh Out's cautionary rhetoric and the variety of rhetorical forms and positions contained within that appear to valorize aspects of the carceral condition. In this instance, inversion occurs when the law-abiding citizens fear and sense of retributive justice is overridden by fascination and titillation occasioned by popular culture fueled conceptions of prison life. In other words, FOP's overall project, I argue, is Contraband Rhetoric in practice because it seduces its 463,000 YouTube subscribers, a mainstream public hungry for prison-life details, with cautionary prison-life details filtered through rhetoric that is both salutary and valorizing of aspects of carceral life.

Further, I contend that mainstream desire for intimate information concerning carcerality is itself a consequence of the contraband rhetoric and rhetorical practices coming from, depicted in, and advocated for in the *Freshout: Life after the Penitentiary* series. In its mission statement, FOP states that their project is to educate the public i.e., those who have little experience with prison life or those who have loved ones or acquaintances are locked up. They're aim is to offer intimate details about prison and post incarceration life. Additionally, FOP wants to detail this information for as broad a public as possible with emphasis on the brutal realities of prison life. Information provided on the platform is meant to offer first person narratives that run counter to popular ideas about incarceration.

Conclusion

There have been a vast number of scholarly investigations into the phenomenon of mass incarceration. Research into its cultural dimensions are hindered by, amongst other things, the deliberate material and social obfuscation of carcerality. Walls and other barriers serve to contain inmates, but they also function to allay public fears and anxieties by making a "black box" of penal institutions. The criminal element is safely ensconced; not only is the physical threat subdued via containment, but our psyches are spared from even the sight of them. What we know of them, by and large, is from popular culture, and even those representations maintain a rigid formulation of what prisons are and who, socially, economically, and racially, are their rightful constituents. Popular media delivers an ostensibly accurate window into carcerality in productions like *Beyond Scared Straight.* However, close rhetorical inquiry reveal that such productions recast preconceptions of incarceration back into our consciousness.

Representationally, the concept of prison becomes an expression of our desires. Our desires to control, formulate, and perceptually contain others. Platforms like *Freshout Productions* are an even more salient example of what the public sphere *needs* from the various categories of interpretations and subjectivity deriving not from the criminal justice apparatus itself, but from emergent social constructions along lines of race, class, and gender. While the "black box" model of incarceration is the institutional construction doing the work of keeping criminalized bodies and collective subjectivities out of sight. Nevertheless, expressions of contraband rhetoric, from penitentiaries in the form of circulating inmate images, on social networks in the re-working of common ideas about prisoners and prisons, and in popular culture where the intersection between material and imagined incarceration is a pivot point upon inmates make claims well beyond prescribed definitions of their own subjectivity. Ultimately, the contraband exemplifies the inmate's perpetual resistance to containment and dynamic projections of the visible self into the world. Contraband rhetoric compels us to recognize the complex culture and humanity existing within and beyond the opacity of material, legislative, and legal constructions. Moreover, it presents as a rich field of inquiry into alternative discursive modes through which the benighted among are able to make claims, assert agency and presence, and make tangible impact within the public sphere.

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