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Intimate Bonds:
Dislocation, Survival, and Resistance in the Era of Neoliberal Punishment

By Nicole Solomon Lindahl

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in

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Abstract

Intimate Bonds: Dislocation, Survival, & Resistance in the Era of Neoliberal Punishment

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Jurisprudence & Social Policy

University of California, Berkeley

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This dissertation explores the life course of individuals who were convicted of violent crimes in adolescence and young adulthood and who served long prison sentences in California in the neoliberal era. It argues that the experience of “dislocation” (Polanyi, 1944) – meaning the rupture of meaningful connection to self, others, and purpose – is essential to understanding why individuals commit acts of violence and why they desist from violence. I explore this theory as it manifests in the life histories of 35 men with whom I conducted life history interviews, all of whom were convicted of violent crimes and served time in California prisons between 1980 and 2015. I focus in particular on a cohort of 15 individuals within this broader sample who were born between 1969 and 1979 and who came of age in urban neighborhoods in the 1980s and 1990s.

I argue that in their early lives, the search for *compensatory intimacy* resulting from dislocation in the family and community evolved into a subsequent attachment to violence and destructive lifestyles that eventually led each to incarceration. The experience of incarceration under neoliberal penalty, characterized by the abandonment of rehabilitation, resulted in further dislocation. As the prison population began rising, leading to the overcrowding characteristic of mass incarceration, the “strategies of control” (Messinger, 1969) promoting rehabilitation and good conduct in previous eras of penal history were replaced with strategies that incapacitated, racialized, and militarized the prisoner population, highly restricting the ability of incarcerated individuals to form genuine relationships and individual identities.

Within these conditions, the private acts of individual prisoners, prison staff, and prison volunteers replaced the state-sponsored rehabilitative offerings previously available. In particular, incarcerated individuals worked with one another to survive and resist their conditions by mentoring one another and sharing resources, providing exposure to new ideas and perspectives, and encouraging each other to take advantage of the limited opportunities at their disposal, including college correspondence courses, the state-run educational and vocational programs that persisted into the neoliberal era, and volunteer-run therapeutic and educational programs.

The personal accounts of individuals experiencing these conditions suggest that the development of “generativity” (Erikson, 1993), or the propensity to promote the well-being of future generations, can occur through maturation, but is also catalyzed by the formation of meaningful relationships and the sense of being attached to a path. The life histories of the young men who came of age during the neoliberal era thus suggest that intimacy – in the form of a meaningful connection to self, community, and a path – is an essential form of survival and resistance to violent and dehumanizing conditions.

*For all those who believe we can do better,
and who work to imagine a different way*

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION: *The View from Richmond, California*

Part One: *Bastards of the Reagan Era*

Chapter One: *Richard and Tomás – Dislocation in Home and Neighborhood Life*
Chapter Two: *Sparky and Henry – Shame: Dislocation from Self*
Chapter Three: *Raymond and Gabriel - The Pull of Violence*

Part Two: *Neoliberal Penalty, Systems Expansion, & Strategies of Control*

Chapter Four: *The Abandonment of the Rehabilitative Ideal*
Chapter Five: *From Rehabilitation to Institutional Racialization*
Chapter Six: *From Reward to Punishment*

Part Three: *Private Acts of Survival, Resistance, & Reconnection*

Chapter Seven: *Intimacy as Physical and Psychological Survival*
Chapter Eight: *Rehabilitation in the Shadows of Neoliberal Penalty*
Chapter Nine: *Turning the Yard*

CONCLUSION: *Looking Forward*

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“I just hated life. I just didn’t care about it. Because of how I grew up, and there was just no value on human life ... Even though I had children, I just didn’t care if I lived or died – it’s just part of the cycle out there.”

-Dante Maldonado
Richmond, California

INTRODUCTION: The View from Richmond, California

Sam Vaughn returned to San Quentin Prison in 2015, eight years after his release, to deliver the keynote address at a graduation ceremony for the San Quentin College Program. After serving a ten-year sentence in the California prison system for attempted murder, Sam returned to his hometown of Richmond, a small, working-class city across the San Francisco Bay from San Quentin, best known for housing a massive oil refinery operated by Chevron. After speaking about his experience of incarceration at a community event, Sam was offered a job by the director of an innovative city program aimed at intervening in the spiking youth homicide rates distinguishing Richmond as one of the most violent cities in the U.S. In describing his work as a “Neighborhood Change Agent” for Richmond’s Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS), Sam had one primary message to deliver to his audience of incarcerated individuals and their families: intimacy – or building engaged, unconditionally supportive relationships – is the essence of preventing youth violence.

Sam’s job is to build relationships with the young people identified as most involved or most “at risk” of involvement in lethal violence, and to support them to connect with a new path in which they serve as “peacemakers” in their neighborhoods. Sam and his coworkers support and encourage youth to detach from their involvement in violence while also letting them know there is *nothing they can do* to lose the support of the program. As the detachment process unfolds, they offer the youth the opportunity to participate in a “peacekeeping fellowship,” through which they receive a stipend that assists them as they secure stable employment. They are attached to a “council of elders,” successful men who provide mentorship and inspiration, and they are offered the opportunity to travel nationally and internationally, on the condition that they agree to be paired with youth from rival Richmond neighborhoods. The work of the ONS is one of the numerous strategies the city credits for its success in reducing homicides – between 2009 and 2014 its homicide rate declined by 75 percent, making 2014 the safest year in Richmond since 1980 (Richmond Police Data, 2016).

Sam attributes many of the lessons he brings to his work with ONS to the lessons he learned from the incarcerated individuals who embraced him when he was transferred to San Quentin several years into his sentence. As Sam concluded his address, his message became more personal. “I miss the community here,” he told his incarcerated audience members. “It is not a healthy world out there, and you need to be prepared for that.”

In this dissertation, I explore three primary questions Sam’s work with the ONS raises: How did Sam, and others like him – urban youth who came of age in the 1980s and 90s and were convicted of violent crimes – move from lives of violence on the streets and in California’s prisons to lives dedicated to preventing violence, developing individual and community self-determination, and dismantling mass incarceration? In what ways do meaningful connections operate to counteract and prevent violence? And how can the formation of meaningful connections be facilitated even in the dangerous and dehumanizing conditions characterizing neoliberal prisons?

Neoliberalism, Mass Incarceration, & Dislocation

Sam is a member of a broader generation of young people who came of age in the era of neoliberal political economics, marked by a valorization of the unbounded pursuit of self-interest. Broadly defined, neoliberalism as it manifests in the United States involves a breakdown of the economic paradigm that emerged out of the New Deal, which rested on the pillars of unionized industry, state-administered social welfare, and a growing, consumption-oriented middle class (Ferguson, 2010). In contrast, the neoliberal economic paradigm, which began unfolding in the 1970s as the US experienced its first major economic decline since World War II, emphasizes the privatization of functions and services previously under the purview state and federal governments; the divestment in state-funding for education and social welfare institutions; and the deregulation of financial markets (Ferguson, 2010). The neoliberal paradigm is justified through discourses emphasizing personal moral responsibility rather than social context as the primary root of social success or failure, and the conflation of morality with the pursuit of profit.

Under neoliberalism, divestment in the social welfare role of the state is accompanied by a simultaneous investment in the punitive arm of the state, including law enforcement, criminal justice, immigration detention, and the military (Wacquant, 2009; Soss et. al., 2011). The term “mass incarceration” refers to the exceptionally high rates of imprisonment in the United States beginning in the 1970s. For the 50 years previous to 1973, incarceration rates in the United States were comparable to those of other developed countries, at between 100 and 200 individuals per 100,000 (Hartney, 2006). Starting in 1973, however, incarceration rates across the 50 states and the federal system began a sharp and consistent rise that continued for the next three and a half decades (Zimring, 2005). The U.S. incarceration rate now hovers at approximately 700 per 100,000 – the highest incarceration rate in the world (Wagner & Walsh, 2016). In 2013, three years after the US incarceration rate plateaued, there were over 2.3 million people confined in federal and state prison systems and local jails (Sentencing Project, 2015).

Mass incarceration is also defined by an acute concentration among the poor and communities of color. Nationally in 2014, 2724 black males were incarcerated for every 100,000 in the general population, as compared to 1,021 Latino males and 465 white males (Sentencing Project, 2015). Among women, 109 black women were incarcerated per 100,000 compared to 64 Latina women and 53 white women (Sentencing Project, 2015). These concentrations become even more pronounced when examined in neighborhood contexts where poverty, race, and ethnicity intersect.

The extreme entrenchment of law enforcement and criminal justice in communities already struggling to survive high levels of unemployment and social disinvestment has exacerbated what economic theorist Karl Polanyi (1944) termed “dislocation.” Psychologist Bruce Alexander (2010a), building off Polanyi’s theory, offers the following definition of the term:

Dislocation is the condition of great numbers of human beings who have been shorn of their cultures and individual identities by the globalization of “free market society” in which the needs of people are subordinated to the imperatives of markets and the economy. Dislocation afflicts both people who have been physically displaced, such as economic immigrants and refugees, and people who have remained in place while their cultures disintegrated around them. Dislocation occurs during boom times as well as recessions, among the rich as well as the poor, among capitalists as well as workers. Today, dislocation threatens to become universal, as global free-market society undermines ever more aspects of social and cultural life everywhere (1).

I posit that the experience of dislocation – meaning the rupture of meaningful connection to self, others, and purpose, i.e., the challenge Polanyi describes of being “shorn of their cultures and individual identities” – is essential to understanding violence. I explore this theory as it manifests in the life histories of 35 individuals I interviewed, all of whom were convicted of violent crimes and served long prison sentences in California during the era of mass incarceration. I focus in particular on a cohort of 15 individuals within this broader group who were born between 1969 and 1979, and who, like Sam, came of age in urban neighborhoods in the 1980s and 1990s.

I argue that in their early lives, the search for *compensatory intimacy* resulting from dislocation in the family and community evolved into a subsequent attachment to violence and destructive lifestyles that eventually led each to incarceration. I use their testimonies to illustrate how the experience of incarceration under neoliberal penalty, given the abandonment of rehabilitation, resulted in further dislocation. State-funded rehabilitative strategies underlying the carceral project in earlier phases of penal history were replaced with practices that incapacitated, racialized and militarized, highly restricting the ability to form relationships and individual identities. Within these conditions, private acts replaced the state-run rehabilitative project, as incarcerated individuals worked with one another to survive and resist their conditions using whatever tools and resources they could find.

The personal accounts of individuals experiencing these conditions suggest that the development of “generativity” (Erikson, 1993), or the propensity to promote the well-being of future generations, can occur through maturation, but is also catalyzed by the formation of meaningful relationships and the sense of being attached to a path. The life histories of the young men who came of age during the neoliberal era thus suggest that intimacy – in the form of a meaningful connection to self, community, and a path – is an essential form of survival and resistance to violence and dehumanizing conditions.

The Lived Experience of Neoliberal Dislocation

This research focuses on the life trajectories of people who were directly impacted by mass incarceration, specifically young people who were convicted of violent crimes and spent decades behind bars. A focus on life histories offers a “developmental” approach “inextricably tied to dynamic concerns and the unfolding of biological, psychological, and social processes through time” (Sampson & Laub, 1997, p. 1). Life histories provide the “flexible” research design that Bruce Western (2015) calls for in the study of violence. They allow for analysis of the multiple roles people play in violence, and their engagement with various levels of social structure from family to neighborhood to school to juvenile detention to prison and back.

I took inspiration from two primary studies in this regard. Sociologists John Laub and Rob Sampson (2009) studied the life course of delinquent men who came of age during the Depression and World War II, analyzing their life histories from an unprecedented age 7 to 70. Their work demonstrates that a focus on the specific era in which individuals reach adolescence is essential to understanding their experience. Many of the men they interviewed experienced pivotal life changes when they entered or were drafted into the armed services, and then returned to the U.S. with access to resources such as the GI Bill. A focus on *generation* is thus essential for understanding the broader historical patterns which enable certain opportunities to emerge while others are foreclosed. Laub & Sampson (2009) focus their research on the concept of “desistance,” or why individuals stop committing crimes. I broaden this lens to focus not only on potential interventions in individual criminality over the life course, but also on the violent contexts in which interpersonal violence takes place. In this regard, I build on Sociologist Bruce Western’s (2015) recent call for situating the

“lifetimes of violence” that people returning from prison have experienced within the violent social contexts they have inhabited.

Criminologist Randol Contreras (2013) studied young Dominican men he grew up with in the South Bronx as they entered the crack market in the 1980s, who, as the market declined and stabilized, turned to robbing drug dealers. Contreras’ proximity to the people he studied enabled an examination of their adoption of violence as it was shaped by the interrelationship of historical events – such as urban “redevelopment,” economic decline, the crack boom, and mass incarceration – and their specific social locations as Dominican men in families struggling to secure stable and dignified work. Contreras focuses primarily on these men’s lives on the streets, analyzing in one chapter their experiences within Rikers Island, the sprawling New York City jail complex. He compellingly illuminates how confinement in Rikers normalized violence, and how their strategies for survival primed them for committing robberies on the streets.

I reverse Contreras’ emphasis. Because I interviewed individuals who served long prison sentences – in some cases longer than their years prior to incarceration – I examine their lives on the streets as a means of contextualizing their experiences in prison. Rather than their confinement serving as a brief but pivotal moment influencing their adoption of violence on the streets, for the men I interviewed, their lives prior to incarceration were a relatively brief but crucial phase leading them towards decades of incarceration. Thus, this dissertation explores the experience of dislocation particularly as it takes place within the neoliberal expansion of the prison system.

I also depart from both Contreras (2013) and Laub & Sampson (2009) by specifically focusing on personal relationships as they are ruptured and reconfigured in violent, neoliberal contexts. Life course analysis of desistance and delinquency suggests the formation of stable bonds – such as a marriage – are one key protection from engaging in crime (Western, 2006; Laub & Sampson, 2009). I take this finding as a departure point, examining in detail the relationships individuals developed throughout their childhoods, adolescences, and adulthoods. The ruptures and reconfigurations they experienced serve as pivotal moments leading both towards and away from violence.

My interest in the role of relationships in the lives of people who have committed violence developed through the personal relationships I formed with incarcerated people as a teacher inside San Quentin prison. From this vantage point I was able to witness the deeply supportive bonds incarcerated men formed with one another as they pursued college degrees, participated in group therapy and self-development programs, and initiated their own services to meet the needs of their peers. I also witnessed how they used this camaraderie to cope with the grinding monotony, sorrow, and degradations of their life in confinement.

As I delved into the life stories of the formerly incarcerated people I interviewed, two-thirds of whom I had met within San Quentin, I increasingly realized how the connections individuals were forming with one another were unique and meaningful along more dimensions than I had previously understood. I came to see that the opportunities individuals were passionately and urgently pursuing within San Quentin – to develop a better understanding of themselves, to develop healthy relationships with one another and their families, and to connect to a viable path upon release – were the very things that had been largely missing from their lives up until that point, and that in many cases led directly to their involvement in violence and incarceration.

I was able to initiate interviews with these individuals through relationships developed over 15 years working at the intersection of prison reform and higher education. All of the men interviewed had completed academic college courses while in prison and/or were pursuing a degree after release. The first ten interviews I conducted were with people referred by the staff of Project Rebound, an admissions program at San Francisco State University serving formerly incarcerated students. An additional 22 interviewees had earned college credit, and in some cases an Associate of

Arts degree, while incarcerated at San Quentin State Prison, where I worked as a program coordinator and English instructor for the San Quentin College Program for four years (2002-2006). I conducted the remaining interviews with formerly incarcerated University of California Berkeley students with whom I worked to form the Underground Scholars Initiative, a program designed to recruit and retain formerly incarcerated students on the UC Berkeley campus.

The small sample of men I interviewed are not representative of the general California prison population. And yet it was not my goal, nor would it have been possible, to obtain a representative sample given the in-depth nature of my research methods. Instead, I sacrificed representativeness for depth and quality in the interviews, opting for a “theory generating” project intended to identify patterns in experience that can be tested for their generalizability across a broader population in future studies (Glaser & Strauss, 2009).

At the same time, the interviewees’ backgrounds and histories were fairly representative of the demographic characteristics of the general prison population: the vast majority of interviewees grew up in poor or working class communities, were raised in unstable families, served time in juvenile detention facilities, dropped out of middle school or high school, and had alcohol and drug habits (see Petersilia, 2003 for a thorough review of the demographic and biographical characteristics among the California prison population). Twelve interviewees identified as African-American or black; ten identified as white; nine identified as Latino; two identified as Asian (Vietnamese and Chinese), one as Pacific Islander, and one as American Indian. Ages ranged from 33 to 55, with three in their 70s.

The quality of the interviews was significantly influenced by the fact that I have long-standing relationships with many of the men who participated; a number of them directly expressed that they were more comfortable sharing information with me due to their faith that I would represent them sensitively and fairly. The most significant concern individuals mentioned in disclosing information and releasing their identity was that I not exaggerate, glorify, or misrepresent their experiences in other ways.

Roadmap

In the chapters that follow, I divide the life histories of individuals convicted of violent crimes into three distinct phases: in Part One, I trace the experiences in childhoods and adolescences prior to incarceration. I examine the dissolution of individual, family and community bonds during the neoliberal era, and the quest for compensatory intimacy leading to the adoption of destructive and violent lifestyles. In Part Two, I examine the experience of incarceration in high security contexts within the California prison system in the era of neoliberal penalty. I describe the vast shifts in the experience of incarceration given new “strategies of control” implemented by prison officials in the void left by the abandonment of rehabilitation. I argue that rehabilitation was replaced by a process of institutional racialization that in turn deepened dislocation, strengthened conformity, and imposed militarization among the incarcerated population. In Part Three, I trace how individual actors, including incarcerated individuals, prison staff, and volunteers, have worked to build relationships and connect to new pathways despite the unpromising conditions of neoliberal penalty. Ultimately, I argue that meaningful connection – the formation of intimate bonds – is an essential antidote to violence and dislocation.

PART ONE: BASTARDS OF THE REAGAN ERA

Reginald Dwayne Betts, a poet and law student who served eight years in prison for a car jacking he committed at the age of 16, depicts the struggles of this generation in a book of poems he released in 2015 entitled *Bastards of the Reagan Era*. Betts explained the meaning behind this title in an interview on National Public Radio: “First is that it’s this idea of being fatherless, but the other idea is ... this notion that a whole sort of generation of young people were bastards of an era, of the Reagan era. I think about my own life, I think about the life of people that’s close to me, and I just recognize that we were ... just lost — lost in time, we were lost in space, and we were struggling to find, I think, a sense of who we were.” Betts then described a short film on woolly mammoths he watched with his young son on a visit to a Chicago museum. In the case of danger – an avalanche, storm, or other disaster – adult woolly mammoths formed a protective circle around the younger animals, shielding them with their bodies. This resonated with Betts: “When I think about the bastards of the Reagan era, when I think about what *didn’t* happen for us, I think we were essentially abandoned by society in large ways, and you can’t look at our lives and see that circle of love and care and nurturing around us” (NPR Books, 2015).

Betts’ reflections on his generation illuminate the subjective experience of dislocation among young people confronting the political and economic forces impacting poor and working class communities in the neoliberal era. Beginning in the mid-1970s, the US experienced devastating economic decline and social disinvestment, leading to the emergence of permanent joblessness and homelessness. Factories, department stores, and industrial plants closed down or moved out of the towns and neighborhoods they had anchored economically for decades, relocating overseas where labor was less expensive. Union membership, the primary source of stable employment for working class men without college education, sharply declined (Kelley, 1996). During President Reagan’s two terms in office, federal funding for housing was decreased by 77 percent, the Neighborhood Self-Help and Planning assistance program was shut down, and funding to cities was substantially decreased, all of which took a particularly severe toll on city budgets (Kelley, 1996). Over Reagan’s tenure, the federal education budget was decreased by 70 percent (Kelley, 1996), and in California, voters passed a ballot measure in 1978 capping property taxes, severely reducing the primary district-level source of school funding. Support for poor families, in the form of the Assistance to Families with Dependent Children program, was also decreased. Permanent joblessness and homelessness emerged for the first time in the 1980s (Kelley, 1996), and between 1969 and 1979, the decade in which the “bastards” were born, childhood poverty in California increased by 25 percent (Gilmore, 2007).

The 1980s were also critically defined by the influx of vast quantities of cocaine and the emergence of crack as a new and cheap alternative to cocaine powder, creating lucrative and dangerous money-making opportunities. Selling drugs offered an alluring alternative to welfare dependence, unemployment, and low-paying and insecure wage work for youth growing up in neighborhoods with high unemployment rates. As supply and demand for crack peaked in the mid-1980s to early 1990s across the country (Hamid, 1992), so too did violent crime and homicide rates. Between 1985 and 1992, national violent crime rates rose sharply, reaching their peak in 1992. This 1992 peak rate was not dramatically higher than rates recorded intermittently since reliable data collection began in 1977. Distinguishing the rising rates between 1985 and 1992, however, were their high concentration among young men, leading Criminologist Al Blumstein (1995) to attribute the predominant change in crime rates to a “dramatic growth in youth homicide beginning in the mid-1980s” (p. 10).

Among 18-year-olds, murder arrest rates rose by over 100 percent between 1985 and 1992. Among 16-year-olds, whose murder rate prior to 1985 was consistently about half the rate of all others aged 18 to 24, the increase from 1985 to 1992 was 138 percent. Even among 13- to 14-year-olds, whose homicide rate was still low enough not to significantly contribute to total murders, the murder rate more than doubled between 1985 and 1992 (Blumstein, 1995, p. 18).

The primary political response to addiction, drug selling, and violence was an escalation of the War on Drugs, two legislative packages passed by the US Congress in 1986 and 1988 elevating drug use and sales to law enforcement's number one priority and passing the largest single-year increases to law enforcement budgets in US history up to that point (Zimring, 2005). Local and federal police departments militarized, states passed legislation increasing sentencing penalties for drug-related crimes, and incarceration rates steadily and sharply rose. This reliance on "criminalization and cages as catch-all solutions to social problems" (Gilmore, 2007, p. 2) was justified through race-coded discourses demonizing the (black) poor as incompetent, manipulative, and morally degraded and offering paternalistic justifications for their discipline through welfare reform and incarceration (Wacquant, 2009; Soss et al., 2011). Likewise, the targeting of drug policy enforcement in low-income communities of color (despite relatively equal reported drug use across race and class) contributed to the acute concentration of incarceration by race, class, and space and imposed militarized state violence onto already deeply vulnerable families and neighborhoods (Wacquant, 2010).

When Betts' describes the "circle of care" he and his fellow "bastards" were lacking as they came of age, he captures the attenuation, disintegration, and rupture of kinship and community bonds occurring within these conditions. And when he defines his generation as "lost," he evokes the existential vulnerability of dislocation, the acute sense of being unshielded, at the mercy of an overwhelming set of social forces out of one's immediate control, and disconnected from a sense of purpose and meaning.

Part One traces the life histories of six of the individuals I interviewed whose lives follow the patterns Betts identifies as defining the "bastards of the Reagan Era." These six men, selected both because they represent the broader patterns and experiences representative of the cohort of "bastards" and, also, because these particular individuals shared their life histories prior to incarceration in the most detail, were born between 1969 and 1979. They came of age in the 1980s and 1990s and were convicted of violent crimes in adolescence or early adulthood. Though these six "bastards" grew up in different regions of California and descend from distinct ethnic and racial lineages, their stories, though idiosyncratic, share certain remarkably similar patterns.

Three common themes emerge across each "bastard's" story, providing a window into how so many children and young adults were criminalized and flooded the California prison system in the 1980s and early 1990s. In each man's path towards incarceration, there were critical moments in which he made decisions to escalate his violent activity. Up until and continuing past those moments, each man's life had been defined by three progressive factors: dislocation from family and community, a consequent vacuum of meaningful relationships leading to shame and extreme vulnerability, and a search for a compensatory source of intimacy, identity, and purpose to fill the resulting void. These are the dynamics that define the "bastards," funneling their purpose and potential into a life of intensifying criminality, violence and, ultimately, incarceration.

In Chapter One, Richard and Tomás' stories depict the ruptured relationships the "bastards" experienced in dislocated families and neighborhoods, and their desperate turn to their peers for protection, belonging, and purpose. In Chapter Two, Sparky and Henry's testimonies reveal how dislocation can be internalized as shame, laying the groundwork for reckless and aggressive behavior. In Chapter Three, Raymond and Gabriel's reflections illustrate how for some, and in the most extreme cases, a potent source of compensatory intimacy can be found in violence itself.

CHAPTER ONE:

Richard and Tomás – Dislocation in Home and Neighborhood Life

The development of a bond to a nurturing adult, particularly in the first three years of life, is of primary importance in establishing healthy emotional patterns and resiliency, the ability to process and bounce back from the inevitable traumas, rejections, and disappointments individuals face during adolescence and adulthood (Maté, 2007). When people are starved of nurturing connections, however, or when the connections they relied upon in daily life rupture and disintegrate, they enter a state of isolation and vulnerability. This dislocation – the loss of connection to one's social role, identity, or the people in one's life – produces emotional isolation, stress, and a sense of powerlessness, which in turn impede the ability to bond with self and others. Disconnected individuals then embark consciously or unconsciously on a quest for something to fill this void, a substance, behavior, or peer group with which to bond. And the pull of that bond becomes increasingly important, regardless of its destructive effects (Alexander, 2008; Maté, 2007). In the neoliberal era, increases in poverty and unemployment and the concentration of incarcerated rates placed high levels of stress on family and neighborhood bonds, increasing the likelihood of extreme and prolonged dislocation for young people growing up in these contexts.

Social scientists have chronicled the instability within families struggling with poverty who often face housing uncertainties, financial stress, and untreated physical and mental health issues. This stress is also associated with chaotic homes involving high levels of crowding and stimulation. It impedes structure and routine, child supervision, and warm interactions between parents and children and among siblings. These conditions make harsh, impatient, and abusive relationships more likely (Evans & Wachs, 2010; Ferguson et. al., 2013).

Urban sociologists have also concentrated on the social disintegration of relationships in marginalized neighborhoods and its association with violence. The loss of jobs in urban centers in the 1970s increased single-motherhood as fathers with low education levels were unable to find ways of supporting their children. Disaffected fathers reduced their support and supervision of children, and mothers' long work hours impeded the time they were able to spend at home (Sampson & Wilson, 1995). In neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, weakened family structures were compounded by weakened ties among neighbors, resulting in the disintegration of "informal social control," the network of adults adopting active roles in instructing and monitoring youth and intervening in destructive behavior before it escalated (Sampson, 1987).

High concentration of incarceration in poor neighborhoods and communities of color further ruptured relationships within families and strained financial resources. When incarceration is concentrated within neighborhoods and families, it contributes to instability and economic fragility along numerous dimensions: incarcerated family members are unable to contribute to the family income and may leave children under the care of relatives (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2015); family on the outside stretch household budgets and emotional capacity to support additional children, to send packages and add money to inmate accounts, accept collect calls, and make trips to prison visiting rooms (Comfort, 2007); when incarcerated family members return to the community, they may have unresolved mental health issues and trauma stemming from their incarceration (Haney, 2003; Kupers & Toch, 1999; DeVeaux, 2013), and their conviction history severely limits their options for securing stable work in the legitimate labor market (Pager, 2008; Petersilia, 2003).

As the "bastards" reached adolescence, the lack of stable and nurturing relationships within their families and neighborhoods left them vulnerable to developing a "peer orientation" as a compensatory means of establishing a coherent role and purpose. Psychologist Gordon Neufeld (2011) argues that "peer orientation" derives from social breakdown, the erosion of the network of

attachments in which child development ought to take place. Peer-oriented youth are deprived of nurturing adult contact, and turn instead to peer groups for the satisfaction of their emotional needs, and for cues on how to act, look, and respond (Neufeld & Maté, 2011). Developmental psychologists have identified adolescence as a phase in which individuals seek a coherent identity narrative to which to attach (McAdams, 2001; Erikson, 1993). The role and purpose dislocated youth find as they turn to their peers can offer this coherent identity, even as it leads them down a highly destructive path.

For Richard and Tomás, the peer orientation they developed as they reached adolescence provided a sense of security, belonging, and a coherent purpose that they otherwise lacked. The insecurity and violence Richard experienced in his family home left him starving for a sense of belonging, which he ultimately found in his neighborhood gang. As he cycled in and out of juvenile detention, another moment of dislocation, Richard's loyalty to the individuals in his gang was replaced by a more abstract loyalty to the Bloods, priming him for gang involvement upon his incarceration for second-degree murder at age 17.

Tomás found purpose by stepping into the shoes of the absent adults in his life, assuming the role of a young patriarch looking after his girlfriend, children, younger siblings, and even the older relatives whose attempts at protection proved futile. In Tomás' neighborhood, the usual social arrangements, in which children play under the watch of caring adults were reversed. Instead, angry and brazen youth gained independence at a young age, intimidating those around them. Adopting the role of protector at such a young age and in dangerous conditions, without the benefit of mature and healthy role models, enabled Tomás to be easily manipulated and easily provoked, leading to his incarceration for felony murder at the age of 16.

When I asked Richard about the life circumstances leading to his incarceration, he described a search for belonging he was unable to find in his childhood home. Richard's family migrated from American Samoa to Hawaii to Wilmington, California, a working class city in South Los Angeles adjacent to the third largest oil field in the US. Richard situated the antecedents of his father's abusive behavior within his father's dislocation, his inability to find a meaningful role or to meet the expectations of masculinity in a foreign, capitalist society:

Right after I was born, we moved to Hawaii – like everyone else, seeking opportunity and chasing the American Dream. Well, it didn't quite work out. A brother and three sisters later, [my parents] divorced. My father became very abusive as he turned to alcohol to reconcile what he believed to be his failure as a man – to provide. I suppose beating my mother, me, and my siblings provided some warped sense of masculinity – something the new world was denying him. In Samoa, manhood was quite simple for him – achievable. There was no individual, but the greater good of the family – the entire extended family or village. Everyone played a specified role – to contribute ... My aunt used to always tell me, "In Samoa, we don't have many millionaires, but we don't have any homeless people also. Everyone takes care of each other. The family is built around individuals, not on top of individuals – which can be easily crushed by the weight of it all." My father – no doubt faced this difficulty and tried to do it on his own in the US – only to be crushed by it all. After my parents divorced, me and my brother stayed in California with my father ... Well from there, it went downhill. Ran away, juvenile halls, detention camp facilities, and prison in a span of about three years.¹

¹ This quote is excerpted from written correspondence.

In 1986, at the age of 13, Richard fled his father's home for the security of a subset of the Piru Bloods. When I asked Richard how he became involved in the gang, he described the territorial lines dividing South Los Angeles and the arbitrariness of his association with the Bloods given the block and neighborhood where his family settled. The gang was easily accessible to him. By living where he lived, he was eligible for membership, and membership did not require money, parental permission, afterschool rides, or adult supervision. He simply needed to be jumped in – beat up by other members of the gang – and for a 13-year-old who had experienced abuse at the hands of a grown man since early childhood, being beat up once as a rite of initiation was well worth the camaraderie and vows to defend one another that followed.

In the small area of Wilmington in which he felt comfortable and rarely left, Richard hung out in an apartment in the projects, selling crack cocaine. The money he made selling drugs was never his primary motivation. When I asked him if he could explain the appeal, he responded:

It was like the loyalty. I could compare it to nationalism. Like how fervent people get about nationalistic ideals? Like stick to it and get very radical about it? And that's like the same drive – it was a sense of loyalty to a group, not just Bloods per se, it kind of evolved to something bigger, but it started out as friends. It started as a street, we lived in the same apartment building, we went to the same schools, and we joined the same gang. And that grew to the next street. And then it eventually got to the projects, which was like five blocks away. So the group eventually got bigger. And there *is* that family loyalty in a lot of ways. In my mind, they were as close to me as my family. And more so, because I left my family to be with my gang.

Through gang membership, Richard found a family. He inherited a set of loyalties and rivalries inscribed into the geography of the city, rooting him in space by attaching him to the several block radius composing his gang's territory. And he supported himself and contributed to the gang's resources by selling drugs, which enabled him to rent an apartment and to buy clothes, cars, and the weapons required to maintain an illicit enterprise. Gang membership thus also rooted him in time, providing a purpose and routine to his days. It temporarily, at least, assuaged his sense of dislocation.

In Richard's life, the involvement of law enforcement and criminal justice agencies were the primary formal intervention addressing his vulnerability as a runaway on the street. Rather than school counselors, community health workers, or other adults in positions of care who might have witnessed and intervened in Richard's life, the first formal intervention arrived in the form of an undercover police officer posing as a drug buyer who arrested Richard for sales of cocaine in 1985, at the age of 13. In the ensuing years, Richard cycled in and out of juvenile detention with continual arrests for drug possession and sales, reflecting shifted law enforcement priorities in the late 1980s targeting the use and sales of prohibited drugs, particularly crack cocaine, and law enforcement efforts focused almost exclusively within low-income communities of color. In the year after his first arrest, while on probation, he was arrested twice more, also for the possession and sale of cocaine. The year after that, he was arrested three more times for sales and possession, moving in and out of the Los Pedrinos and Eastlake juvenile halls.

For his third arrest in 1987, the judge imposed a nine-month sentence in a juvenile camp, but stipulated that if Richard maintained good behavior for the first three months and wrote a letter to the court, he would be eligible for early release. Though they reviewed his case and his sentence was suspended after three months, it was reinstated when a drug test tested positive for marijuana, cocaine, and alcohol, and he ultimately served a 10-month camp term at a facility in the Central

Valley. After his release from the camp, Richard was arrested twice more for possession, and on the second arrest he was chased by police and attacked by a police dog which dragged him from underneath a car, at which point the two officers kicked him in the face, breaking his front teeth. When the officers realized he was a juvenile, they booked him in the Los Angeles County Jail under an adult alias in order to avoid the questions they would be asked about his injuries at the juvenile facility.

Richard found that cycling in and out of juvenile hall did not serve as a productive intervention or offer him a meaningful alternative to the lifestyle he had adopted. Rather, in each stint of confinement, he recalls experiencing an “internal hardening.” Criminal justice intervention normalized and validated Richard’s use of violence as a means of self-protection:

Like, every time I got to juvenile hall, I became much more [thoughtful pause] harder, internally. So I remember the first time I went to juvenile hall, LP [Los Pedrinos], I think I cried the whole day. *Loudly*, so everyone including staff heard me. But I was *terrified*. I was scared. I didn’t know what was happening, or what was going to happen. And I was a pretty small, scrawny kid, so I couldn’t fight. I could run, but I couldn’t fight. I was the target of a lot of bullying ... By the time you do get out, you’re just angry, so – and then you end up going back several times, and the next time is easier because now you know what to expect ... It becomes easier now to play the part – to look hard to avoid being picked on. Sometimes even taking off first just to make sure – to let people know they can’t mess with you ... And I think that, kind of, definitely, I think, it recreates itself. These guys who were picking on me were probably picked on themselves in the beginning. It creates this cycle where you realize that you have to do something in order for people to realize.

So the fourth, fifth time I went back, I didn’t get into any fights. How you carried yourself had a lot to do with how people treated you. But at that point it was me being the aggressor ... I wasn’t scared anymore. It wasn’t anxiety about being in there, but about how long I was going to be in there. About outside forces like what’s the judge going to do. I think that started to reinforce – like, harden myself internally.

Inside juvenile hall, stripped of the protective bonds he had formed with his street gang, and unprotected by facility staff, Richard experienced a heightened version of the vulnerability and exposure he had already experienced in his family home and on the streets. But as he adjusted to the environment, he learned to play the part, holding his body to communicate to others that he would not be the easy target of bullying and violent aggression. The accompanying emotional cycle began with isolation and terror, was layered upon by anger, and then further layered upon by a kind of numbed nonchalance.

These spells of confinement served to dislocate Richard once again, this time from his friends and the relative safety of their neighborhood turf, and in the vacuum created, the importance of his gang as an abstract entity became more salient. As his bonds to his peers were ruptured through friends’ deaths and the isolation he experienced in confinement, his ongoing concerns for safety and survival translated into a proxy connection to the gang itself. In discussing his relationships with the friends in his street gang when he first joined, Richard recalled:

It wasn’t about the gang, the Bloods per se; it was about that small group of people you’ve taken on to defend. They defend you. And their loss had an emotional impact. And so by the time you get to prison, a loss is just a loss ... It begins to take shape where you begin to get disconnected with the people and more towards the gang, as opposed to on the streets where it’s more the people and less the gang. But in juvenile hall, you start to realize that the

gang creates more numbers than the people, than having friendships ... the people began to get disconnected ... and the gangs become this replacement.

As Richard became increasingly hardened as he bounced in and out of juvenile hall, and as the other youth in his gang and his rival gangs also circulated in and out of the same facilities, becoming harder themselves, the violence he experienced in his life on the streets escalated. He witnessed friends shot and killed, another fracturing of the relationships in his life serving to further entrench his loyalty to his gang and to perpetuate cycles of retaliation. In describing in more detail how many people he knew who were shot or killed during adolescence, Richard recalled:

I knew, personally five, that I interacted with a lot, that were killed, shot, ran over, police killed them – or, but overall, and then there’s like 10 people who were shot but not killed... Two of them happened in front of me – one of them was a friend of mine got the side of his head blown off with a shotgun. He was getting out of his car and someone drove up beside him, came out and shot him close range with a shotgun. He was killed. And the other one was a younger, one of the younger kids, got ran over underneath the car and coming out, and I just happened to be in the car behind them... I’ve been there when people got shot – just in the leg, or – with a 12 gauge, birdshot – or shot at a bunch of times, but luckily, I just never got hit... The closest I came was a gun right here on the side of my face went off. They tried to bring it up on my face, but I guess I didn’t stick my head close enough [chuckling], so it kind of “Pschew” – I felt the flames, but that just started a *baail* of gunfire.

It was like, I don’t know, when [an attack] happened and we went back and we tried to figure out who did it, and if you don’t know you just go to the neighborhoods around [to get revenge], and so *they* [the people from the other neighborhoods] come back [to retaliate], and so the only people who get caught up [injured in the violence] are the people who didn’t know or who are younger and just don’t care.

Richard details not only the extreme and frequent lethal violence he experienced as a youth, but also the retaliatory cycles that emerge – the fact that this kind of thing “just happens” and that when it’s not possible to figure out who perpetrated a particular act, retaliation can become more random, and it is often people who had nothing to do with it in the first place, who “didn’t know” or “don’t care” who end up serving as the proxy victims. And it is exactly this pattern that led to Richard’s incarceration for second-degree murder.

This occurred a few months after his release from the LA County Jail, when he caught a ride home with some friends who had come by the apartment in the projects where Richard was dealing crack. They had just been disrespected by rival gang members at a party at a local Veteran’s Hall. Though Richard knew his friends were planning to stop at the party to retaliate before dropping him off, he went along for the ride, even supplying them with an Uzi that was lying around. While his friends went inside the party, Richard stayed in the car waiting for their return. He recalled:

People were running around the parking lot chasing each other. Finally the driver took the car to the front of the place – it was a VFW that was being rented for the party ... so he drove it to the front and told me to get out with the Uzi. I think he was just kinda scared ... And a couple – two of the guys [I came with] were hitting on the door, and I didn’t know it at the time, but they were chasing the security guard ... And they were banging on the door, and someone started, “Shoot the door, shoot the door!” And for a second I thought about just shooting at the sign for some reason, instead of the door, but I turned and just kind of

fired at the door. I thought I only fired twice, but apparently it was a whole bunch of times. But the security guard was behind the door.

I didn't find out anybody died 'til the next day. The guy who I slept over at his house, he called and said someone had died, and I couldn't believe it. "It couldn't have been me!" I couldn't put two and two together. I thought the door was metal, but it must have been sheet metal. So [I thought] it was impossible for the bullet to go through that. But finally they arrested me.

In 1989, at the age of 17, Richard was charged as an adult with murder in the second degree. He eventually agreed to a plea deal, and was sentenced to 17-years-to-life in the California prison system. Richard continued seeking security and connection through the avenues available to him, and moved from the disconnection and insecurity he experienced in his father's home, to the sense of belonging he experienced within his gang, to the security he hoped to find within the Bloods as he prepared to serve a long sentence in California prisons. Each moment of dislocation heightened his insecurity, and in each moment his attachment to group loyalties as a form of protection and meaning became even more significant, even as he lost the genuine intimacy he was seeking all along.

For Tomás, the dislocation he experienced in his childhood and adolescence derived not only from his parents' absence, but also from the social disintegration in his neighborhood. Tomás grew up in Stockton, a diverse, medium-sized city promoted as the northern gateway to the rich farmland of California's central valley. Beginning in the 1980s, however, Stockton earned a new claim to fame as the northern end of "prison alley" – the 18 prisons, 13 of which were constructed after 1980, stretching south along the Central Valley towards the Tehachapi desert (Gilmore, 2007). In Stockton, Tomás experienced the disintegration of social institutions like schools and community centers and the rise of local organizations reflecting concentrated unemployment, drug use, and incarceration (Wacquant, 2009).

Tomás' father had a history of incarceration and was absent for most of his childhood; his mother was out of the house for over 12 hours a day given the long hours she worked to support the family as a single parent. As a result, Tomás was left largely unsupervised to find relationships and occupation among his peers and siblings.

Without family as a source of structure in his life, Tomás' neighborhood schools could have provided him an island of stability. Though Tomás was placed in gifted programs in his elementary and middle schools, these opportunities to form constructive routines and connections were counteracted by the violence and vulnerability he experienced in the same local schools. His first brush with mortality occurred at the age of 10 or 11 when, in one of the first major school shootings on record, his cousin was one of a dozen children shot at school by a stranger with an automatic weapon. Tomás' school was also the site of more mundane and routine gun violence, which only served to normalize the use of guns as a means of protection and survival:

I was shot at – I think that was traumatizing too. At the time it was like, "I just got shot at!" Like it was kinda cool or something. But at my school, some guy started shooting at us. At our school, we couldn't have lockers because people brought guns to school. So we were across the street one time – I think we thought we were gonna fight with some guy. He pulls out a gun and just starts shootin.' Shootin' everyone. He didn't hit anybody. But I was 13.

So I had a lot of experience with, like, people shootin', people get killed, so in my mind, I was like, "Okay, I gotta have a gun."

Rather than offering a safe haven from the chaos of his home, Tomás' school became an additional reinforcement of violence as a regular fact of life. Perhaps a more important institution in Tomás' adolescence than his neighborhood school was the open-air drug market that existed in Stockton's downtown. In describing the fine balance he attempted to maintain between legitimate and illegitimate employment, Tomás recalled:

And when we started collecting guns, that kind of thing, then it was like, I knew – I even knew then I was going down a road that I probably shouldn't be going down. But I figured I could do it – I had a job, I was making 10 dollars an hour – that was good money back then ... I was going to school at night, I was selling a little bit of drugs on the side ... I used to sell crank to the dealers. Those were my customers – guys that dealt heroine, weed, other stuff, crack. They all liked to sell dope all night ... And back then, the dope spot was a place called Mariani's? I don't know if you've heard of it – it was a block from the police station. Famous dope spot in Stockton. They had the signs up. People put up signs, like "Weed, \$5." It was crazy ... But for *years*, I mean, the cops knew it was there, *everybody* knew it was there. People'd go to those little \$5 a night motels people'd stay in and shoot dope.

The neighborhood drug market in Stockton fueled an economic ecosystem of dealers, buyers, prostitutes, pimps, and a clientele for the hourly motels in the area. In Tomás' adolescent world, these economic opportunities appeared to dominate the lives of the adults and peers surrounding him. He recalled:

There wasn't like – I didn't know any doctors or – right? The people that were cool were selling dope or gang-banging. I'm sure there was, but in my little 16-year-old or 14-year-old world, that's what I saw ... so I'm sure there was somebody in my neighborhood that wasn't selling drugs, but to *me, then*, everybody was doing it.

This sense of being surrounded by youth and adults who were involved in the drug trade was solidified by the histories of incarceration the adult males in his life shared. All of the older men Tomás mentioned in our interview – his father, his best friend's father, his mother's boyfriend, and his mother's boyfriend's relatives – had histories of incarceration and were affiliated with prison gangs. Tomás began to notice that the people he grew up around who had served time were more oriented towards their lives inside prison than outside:

I grew up with a lot of the shot callers [high status gang members], Northern, NF [the Nuestra Familia prison gang] guys. My mom's boyfriend, his family was all active NF guys. But I knew them all as homeless people, like bums, heroin addicts – 'cause this is what they do out there on the street, right? ... I mean, if you think about people in prison – unless you're like – if you're 34, 35 – unless you're like this big time dope dealer, you can't get a job. You're not working ... I mean in prison it's cool, cause they feed you and all that and you can be the shot caller and people respect you. But that doesn't transfer over into any kind of marketable skill when you're on the street. So all these guys that I knew – who were like the big homies – they used to come to my house when I was a kid and I use to give them Top Ramen.

Tomás' memories of the men who had served time in prison brutally depicts the marginalization of under-educated and convicted men whose primary options for gaining respect

and a sense of self-worth derive from their experiences as members of an organization that operates inside the prison system. The meaningful role and connection they find in belonging to a prison gang does not translate into secure and stable employment in the community. The stigma of a criminal conviction and ubiquitous screening – particularly in industries offering work to individuals without college education – make finding work even at minimum wage a frustrating and humiliating prospect (Pager, 2008).

Witnessing the failure and despair of those around him led Tomás to reject the glorification of prison hierarchies. For other young people growing up in similar environments, however, the path to incarceration pervasive among the older men surrounding them became a goal in and of itself; something attainable, something they could easily visualize themselves pursuing. For Tomás even as his aspirations disavowed the prison lifestyle, they continued to reflect the absence of clear pathways out of poverty and into a sense of authentic meaning and purpose: “Just hoping we didn’t get killed or end up in prison was pretty much the extent of our goals back then.”

Amidst the drugs, gangs, and gun violence in his neighborhood, Tomás and his best friend Mark turned to one another and formed a protective circle of their own. They lived four houses down from one another, and their younger brothers also became best friends. They began dating sisters, with whom they each fathered a child, making their kids first cousins. And they stepped into the role of the young patriarchs of their newly formed families. While Richard found his surrogate family in his neighborhood gang, Tomás and Mark created their own families to replace the healthy adult bonds they lacked in their daily lives.

The incident resulting in Tomás and Mark’s convictions was provoked by a skirmish involving their younger brothers, who looked to Tomás and Mark for protection. Two young men Tomás and Mark had attended school with became their rivals as they reached adolescence. The rivalry began with fistfights, but escalated one day:

It was daytime, and Mark’s little brothers and his grandfather were on an overpass. They were watching a wreck. And [our rivals] went by and said something, and then the grandfather stepped in and they beat him up and stabbed him. So that’s when it really escalated.

In that moment, in that neighborhood, the web of social ties contributing to “informal social control” (Sampson, 1987) had been eroded by incarceration, long work hours, addiction, and neighborhood violence to the degree that the power balance shifted in the direction of dislocated youth, reversing traditional social and familial hierarchies.

Into this void stepped Tomás and Mark, whose protective urges were provoked during a period of escalating violence that erupted after Mark’s grandfather was stabbed. This reflects the tendency for “peer-oriented” youth to influence one another towards reactive, reckless, and volatile behavior, rather than towards healthier emotional channels (Neufeld & Maté, 2011):

So that night, after the grandpa got stabbed there was some shooting stuff, they shot at [Mark]’s house too. Like 20 bullets. And then it went silent for a while. So we’re inside – [Mark] is on an ankle bracelet, and so I go hang out with him in his house because he can’t go anywhere. So his brothers are playing outside. It’s like 1 am – and the brothers run in and say, “It’s them!” So we go and grab our guns, [Mark] went out first, and the car was sitting there idling, and so finally he fires at the car twice. And now I’m standing behind him, and I fire over the top of him, boom. And that was it. They drove off. We didn’t know anyone had gotten hit. We were waiting, we thought they were coming back. We had all the kids get down. We really thought that we were like the protectors of the family, the protectors of the house.

As it turned out, Mark's younger brother – himself growing up surrounded by drug dealing, shootings, gang-banging, and the vulnerability of adolescents – wanted to test the degree of protection the older siblings were ready to provide, and manufactured a situation that resulted in another death. In describing the questions and evidence raised at trial, Tomás explained:

The thing that never comes up is that [Mark]'s younger brother lied. [His brother] wanted to see how Mark would react. And in the court the brother was crying, saying, "I lied." ... He was really traumatized.

In the darkness of the neighborhood, with a stockpile of weapons in the bedroom, with righteous indignation at the attack on Mark's grandfather, and with the provocation of a younger brother eager to see how far his older sibling would go to defend their family and home, Mark, with Tomás right behind him, shot into a dark car, killing someone who was entirely uninvolved in the dispute with the other neighborhood youth:

It turns out it wasn't them, it was just people fucking around. Three guys got drunk. They're partying ... We finally fell asleep, and then a few hours later, there were cops everywhere. The whole block was surrounded. And I still didn't know. Everything is pitch black in that neighborhood, because they shoot out the streetlights in that neighborhood. As soon as they fix them, people shoot them out.

Tomás and Mark were 16 at the time, and were both tried as adults. And though Tomás shot into the air over Mark's head, he was convicted of second-degree murder under the felony murder statute, and sentenced to 18-years-to-life in the California prison system.

Conclusion: Dislocation, Peer Orientation, and the Quest for Belonging and Purpose

The dislocation Richard, Tomás, and the "bastards" experienced on a personal level in their families and on a collective level in their abandoned neighborhoods translated into a quest for belonging and purpose. As Tomás and Richard reached adolescence, they turned to their peers for protection and for the meaningful role this peer-orientation provided. The name, territory, and colors associated with a particular gang and the vow to defend one's peers to the death provide a meaningful sense of identity and a coherent role individual's seek as they enter adolescence. Though the bonds of loyalty and the sense of connection they developed with their peers ran deep, Richard and Tomás also found it difficult to maintain stability and security in the tenuous conditions in which they formed their surrogate families, and their use of violence to protect and defend one another resulted in the disruption of these relationships almost as soon as they were formed.

Tomás developed an inchoate sense that the conditions in which his family and community were mired were unjust. He reflected:

Even as a 16-year-old, or a 14-year-old, I was like, you know, "the system is against me." I couldn't articulate anything, but I understood that this was a poor neighborhood, we didn't have all the same advantages as everybody else, and even though I wouldn't be able to *say*

that, I just knew that something was wrong. So my way of dealing with it was I would sell drugs. I would be some kind of a rebel – I don't know what I thought – something like that back then. So that's how I, like, justified, or I told myself it was okay.

Given his inability to articulate and productively channel this sentiment, he expressed it by continuing to dabble with the rebellious identity and risky behaviors by which he was surrounded, giving credence to scholars who have identified a latent political potential in the seemingly chaotic and self-defeating preoccupations of marginalized youth (Rios, 2011; Kaulingfreks, 2016). For others, however – and perhaps underlying Tomás' sense of anger – rejection, social abandonment, and vulnerability is internalized, translating into a deep sense of shame. Without the opportunity to articulate their feelings or situate their individual experience within the broader political and historical forces shaping their lives, they internalize the sense that their lives, and the lives of those around them, hold little intrinsic value.

CHAPTER TWO: *Sparky and Henry – Shame: Dislocation from Self*

In 1988, the same year a second federal legislative package in the “War on Drugs” was introduced to Congress by the newly created Office of Drug Control Strategy, and the “bastards” were entering adolescence, Sociologist Jack Katz published a groundbreaking theory in crime and violence research. While previous sociological approaches focused heavily on background conditions like poverty and racial marginalization as the drivers of high rates of property and violent crime (e.g., Merton 1938), to Katz these theories fell victim to a blinding sentimentality. Instead, he argued, while it is essential to note these correlations, the concrete causal mechanisms behind the commission of crime must in fact be located in “the emotional foreground” – the “moral and sensual attractions” of committing crime (Katz, 1988).

Randol Contreras (2013), who studied the torture-robberies committed by men he grew up with in the South Bronx, offers a critique of researchers who followed in Katz’s footsteps without employing an equal degree of analytic sensitivity (e.g., Shover & Honaker 1992; Jacobs & Wright, 1999), arguing that they fell into a trap: “Rather than situating Katz’s ideas within structural factors such as poverty, social class, and the economy, some researchers would *strictly* ride down the emotional and cultural landscape of crime” (p. 4; author’s emphasis). While these accounts meticulously examine the micro-dynamics of street crime, they explore emotional thrills without sufficiently contextualizing them in the socio-economic and political context in which they take place.

This vein of criminological scholarship also largely neglects a more deeply buried emotional dimension to crime and violence; while rightfully embracing emotion as an important and valid object of study, the work focuses on the immediate emotional displays of young men – the bravado and braggadocio, the posturing and excitement in getting away with an illicit act or causing harm to another – rather than scratching below the surface to understand the deeper emotional states from which these surface level displays emerge. They thus neglect the emotional complexity of the individuals they studied, particularly the constellation of human emotions – fear, shame, depression, guilt, remorse, sadness, self-loathing – that could be condensed under the umbrella of “pain,” and which conflict with the postures and expressions expected of adolescent masculinity in contemporary patriarchal societies.

Katz (1988) himself adopts a more nuanced approach than those Contreras (2013) critiques [do you mean critics] who followed in his footsteps. Though the thrust of Katz’s analysis explicitly emphasizes the “foreground” of criminal experience, in his conclusion he draws attention to the emotional *background* underlying the superficial affective sensation and display forming the primary object of his analysis. Shame and humiliation are the emotional foundation upon which the myriad forms of violence and criminality are built. The “sneaky thrills” of shoplifting, for example, are committed by youth who “innovate games with the risks of humiliation,” and in “righteous slaughter,” the “impassioned assailant takes humiliation and turns it into rage” in an attempt to “burn humiliation up” (p. 312-13).

A decade later, Psychiatrist James Gilligan (1997), who served as Director of Mental Health for the Massachusetts Department of Corrections for over a decade, published a theory of violence foregrounding the experience of shame. Gilligan posits the experience of shame as the single most potent underlying emotional condition giving rise to violent acts. Gilligan explains that consistent and extreme exposure, vulnerability, and shame are made bearable through the process of emotional numbing; thus, shame is experienced not so much as a feeling, but as a lack of feeling. As such, shame acts as a form of internalized dislocation, a dislocation from self.

The suppression of emotions among adolescent boys and men reflects the gendered nature

of shame. Though shame feels the same for men and women, it is experienced in response to differing sets of expectations (Brown, 2012). For women, shame derives from the expectation to work, take care of the family and home, and to do it all while looking beautiful. In this sense, women face an unattainable and conflicting set of expectations (Brown, 2006). For men, however, shame derives from one coherent expectation: to not be perceived as weak. When men are perceived as vulnerable, their emotional expressions are [not sure what you mean] by peers and adults across genders expecting protection, emotional stoicism, and displays of strength (Brown, 2012). As such, boys and men are subject to a particular and potent form of oppression under patriarchal systems: to not display or process emotions that might be perceived as a form of weakness.

For Steven, to whom I refer from this point forward by his nickname Sparky, the abuse and neglect he experienced in his family's home translated into his sense at the age of 10 that he was a "bad human." Sparky's ensuing engagement in the sneaky thrills of shoplifting and stealing cars satisfied what he now understands as a need for the "outrageous stimulation" he required in order to feel. And his adoption of a "crazy" persona enabled him to distract others from the vulnerability he experienced through criminalization. Henry's adolescence was defined by the search for an identity distinguishing him from the shame of his poverty and the internalized stigma he associated with his American Indian heritage, also leading him towards increasingly reckless and arrogant behavior. For both Sparky and Henry, the sense of rejection and exposure – of being a misfit and an outsider – was exacerbated by the criminalization they experienced among the web of adult authority figures in their lives, particularly in their schools and local law enforcement agencies.

Sparky described the experience of bouncing back and forth between the homes of his father and mother as moving between "total control" and "complete chaos," replicating on the personal level the social disinvestment and punitive entrenchment of neoliberal policy on the broader, societal level:

So my dad was a hardcore drunk Hungarian refugee from the Communist curtain, and my mom was a runaway Catholic from St. Louis, you know, rebellious Catholic girl runaway ... So that didn't last, and ...well really what it amounted to was complete lack of security. You know the people that were supposed to be protecting me and providing for me were the ones I feared the most ...

My dad was a very scary man ... That's how I got started was just – he retrained me into being right-handed ... So he knelt me on corn – that was for the light offenses. The heavier offenses like not taking out the trash, things like that, were like bare butt, leather belts, that kind of thing. And then he got – you know, it escalated, where it was closed-fisted kind of discipline and going into walls. So anyways, it was that kind of – you know a lot of fighting in the house 'til the house disintegrated – the household broke up, and that was a blessing.

Sparky understands his father's heavy-handed discipline as embedded in his personal biography – the fact that lethal violence was the means by which he escaped the oppressive regime under which he himself grew up in Hungary, which served as a source of pride and a symbol of manhood. "He just had killer – he wore killer like a – he would kill *me*," Sparky reflected, continuing, "And I mean, I don't judge him. Where he comes from, it's like your neighbor turns you in, and they disappear you."

After his parents split up, Sparky's mother's addiction to alcohol deepened, and he began to experience an alternative form of vulnerability – the isolation and insecurity stemming from neglect:

Her drug of choice was alcohol, and she lived at the bar. So I went from having this really draconian, like heavy, heavy-handed disciplinarian to no parental supervision at all. None. Zero. And so how I dealt with that was I did whatever I wanted because I went from having the worst consequences for the slightest behavior to having no consequences for the worst behavior. It was very liberating, very nice, actually. But it was scary, you know? There was no food.

The abandonment, volatility, and violence Sparky experienced in his family life were compounded by the conditions he encountered in his Los Angeles neighborhood in the mid-1980s, a dangerous place for a young person with little parental supervision or structure. The adults Sparky encountered in his neighborhood were incapable of providing the attentive protection and nurturing Sparky lacked in his home life:

We lived in *the* worst part of town. The MacArthur Park area of Los Angeles is just, you know, *rampant*. Murder and drug addiction and all that kind of stuff. Like I went *right* into [snaps finger] – I remember being maybe 10, maybe 11, somewhere around the 5th grade – 4th, 5th grade – watching the sun come up over – the sun coming through a window of a trashed-out squat in Hollywood, and I'm smoking crack with a prostitute and her pimp, who's also her drug dealer, and we're making our way through my mom's tip money, and – that's really where I put my finger on where – like that's – like at the time, I just – it was like, I'm a bad human. You know, I steal from my mom. I don't go to school. I'm just bad news, you know? And I look back on it now – it's like, no! Nobody was wondering where I was at. Nobody was asking themselves, "Where is this guy?"

Over time, Sparky's moral compass began to fade. He recalled how the first time he stole his mother's tip money, he took the dollar bill straight to the trash, overcome with remorse. But only a couple of years later, he remembers lifting her head off her purse to take money and feeling "nothing at all."

This dissociation from one's emotions is a common symptom of childhood abuse. Gilligan (1997) argues, "violence—whatever else it may mean—is the ultimate means of communicating the absence of love by the person inflicting the violence." Children who fail to receive sufficient love and nurturing also fail to build the capacity and the reserves of self-love which "enable them to survive the inevitable rejections and humiliations which even the most fortunate of people cannot avoid" (p. 47). And without feelings of love, the self feels "numb, empty, and dead" (p. 47). Sparky's ongoing abuse and neglect dislocated him from himself, instilling a sense of self-loathing that he instinctually blocked to avoid the pain, which in turn blocked his ability to feel more generally. During this phase, Sparky also began stealing candy and junk food from convenience stores, the thrills satisfying his need to feel, and the items themselves satisfying his ongoing hunger.

As Sparky approached adolescence, he experienced ongoing shaming as he was funneled out of the school system and towards the streets and juvenile detention by teachers and school administrators, law enforcement personnel, and his parents. After three years shadowing 40 black and Latino young men in Oakland, California, Sociologist Victor Rios (2011) described the system of stigmatization and criminalization the youth encountered among the authority figures with whom they interacted – teachers and administrators in their schools, police and probation officers in their neighborhood, and parents in the home. Rios argues that this "youth control complex" is fostered by a complex process by which "even well-intentioned adults participated in the criminalization of

the boys” (p. 75). Living within the youth control complex was often incapacitating, leading Rios to borrow the term “pathological shaming” from Criminologists Hagan and McCarthy (1997) to describe an individual’s sense of being “permanently stigmatized, shamed into feeling like a permanent outsider, and perpetually humiliated for his or her negative behavior” (Rios, 2011, p. 90).

For Sparky, this process of “pathological shaming” began towards the end of elementary school, when, given the lack of outlets for processing his trauma, he describes being incapable of managing his behavior and conforming to the norms expected within the classroom:

I couldn’t deal with the little petty [hesitates] knicky-knacky rules, kind of thing. That’s what always got me in trouble. I literally ditched the entire fourth and fifth grade. So I just couldn’t deal. I didn’t have any skills for following that kind of direction.

This truancy resulted in the school and probation officials holding a meeting with Sparky and his family to set him back on track, but rather than provide engaged case management, links to individual or family counseling and addiction treatment, or other interventions that might have assisted Sparky and his family members to cope with the emotional turmoil and trauma of their lives, the encounter instead entrenched Sparky’s sense of personal responsibility for his family’s instability and his own volatile behavior:

At one point the probation department sat my whole family down in a room in one of those boardrooms in the LA probation department with the big chairs and a nice table. And there was this large, black detective at the front of the room telling me – actually, when he got me alone, he said, “Well, when you go to juvenile hall, they’re going to fuck you. And so if you don’t go to school, we’re sending you there” ... So then he takes me back in the room, and he tells my family, “If you, Steven, don’t start going to school, I’m going to break up this family, and you’re going to juvenile hall.”

Sparky’s inability to conform to the disciplinary norms of the public school system triggered what scholars have termed the “school-to-prison-pipeline,” the increasing reliance on law enforcement and criminal justice agencies and discourses to manage and punish misbehavior in the classroom and schoolyard (Noguera, 2003; Rios, 2011; Simon, 2007). Sparky’s truancy placed him at the center of a ring of adult authority figures who threatened him and saddled him with the responsibility of holding his volatile family together, reflecting the prevalent neoliberal narrative attributing criminal behavior to poor choices, while neglecting to take into account an individual’s vulnerability and social circumstances (Wacquant, 2009).

The meeting at the probation department did little to expand Sparky’s capacity for sitting still; rather, it spurred him to begin mentally preparing for juvenile hall:

And so I didn’t go back to school. They put a guy out in front of my school to make sure I went to school, and I would walk in the front, wave to him ... and walk out the back and jump the fence. I was like – I was just wondering what it was going to be like to go to juvenile hall because there was no way in hell I’m going to school. No way. I can’t do it. I just couldn’t do it.

Sparky’s forays into criminal justice involvement began earlier than Henry’s, and though they were facilitated by his treatment in school and probation, he was first incarcerated at the request of this mother after he stole her VCR for the second time. Sparky had been arrested and released on six previous occasions starting at age eight. This time, at age 13, he was sentenced to a year in a juvenile

camp. It was during this first confinement in juvenile detention that Sparky began to consciously embrace violent behavior.

The pathological shaming Sparky experienced as he was continuously stigmatized by the adults in his life was compounded by his acute sense of vulnerability and exposure upon entering juvenile detention. Gilligan (1997) describes shame as motivating “the wish for concealment, the wish not to be seen” (p. 64). Quoting Psychologist Erik Erikson, he explains the link between exposure and the urge towards violent behavior: “Shame supposes...one is visible and not ready to be visible; which is why we dream of shame as a situation in which we are stared at in a state of complete undress ... He who is ashamed would like to force the world not to look at him, not to notice his exposure. He would like to destroy the eyes of the world” (p. 64).

When I asked Sparky to describe his first day of confinement, he expressed a similar sense of the intolerable exposure as Gilligan describes, and an adoption of violence as a means of concealing this vulnerability. He recalled:

Okay, well, like my first day was like my mom turned me in. That was my first day I ever did time. That was pretty significant for me because then I was really all alone. It was like – the last bridge I had that connected me to other people was gone. So that was really lonely that day ... When I went to my cell, I decided that I wasn’t going to be a victim, that I was just going to attack the first person that even looked at me wrong. And I did that, and it was very gratifying because nobody expected it ... Everybody’s pissed. Chairs are turned over. We’re all on the ground, and everybody’s looking at me like I’m crazy. I loved it. “Yes, I’m crazy. I’m going to be crazy!” I wasn’t crazy. I was scared. I was a scared, skinny little 13-year-old white boy. But that kind of became my calling card because I wanted to be outrageous, kind of keep people from looking at me closely.

In a moment of profound dislocation, Sparky adopted a strategy of pre-emptive violence to distract others from seeing his vulnerability. The prediction of the police detective primed Sparky to expect violation and abuse, and it combined with the total isolation of entering a penal facility to produce an excruciating sense of exposure and fear. His insight, that acting crazy and unpredictably violent would keep people from “looking at him closely,” illustrates his sense of acute exposure as a young, physically weak, and isolated young man in a foreign and terrifying environment lacking protection from parents, facility staff, and peers. Though he was unable to literally destroy the eyes of those watching him, he figuratively destroyed their ability to see his weakness by creating an aura of “craziness.” He thus adopted the appearance of the aggressive and frightening “super predators” political figures depicted in the ensuing years (Delulio, 1995).

In this context, he also experienced his whiteness as a form of vulnerability, perhaps because he stood out given the extreme over-representation of youth of color in the juvenile justice system. When describing his early arrest record, however, Sparky attributed his release on his first six arrests to his skin color, given that the black youth with whom he was arrested were never released.

When Sparky returned to his mother’s house from the juvenile camp a year later, the violent behavior he adopted and the reputation for unpredictability he earned translated into intensified aggressive activity on the street. At that point, he recalled, the “lightweight stuff stopped happening.” He committed a car-jacking immediately upon release, and after that charge was dropped, he committed another. For the second car-jacking, at the age of 14, he was sentenced to nine and a half years in the California Youth Authority. His adolescence ultimately unfolded within the Intractable Ward Program (IWP), the long-term solitary confinement unit with California’s juvenile prisons.

Unlike Sparky, in Henry's childhood home, there was always love and food despite his family's poverty. Similar to Sparky, Henry adopted a strategy of recklessness as a means of establishing an identity that was valorized by his peers and which distinguished him from the powerlessness he associated with and felt stifled by among his relatives.

Henry's search for an alternative identity may be best understood within the legacy of colonialism shaping the relationship among West Coast Indian tribes, European settlers, and the US government, which involved a decimation of the Yurok people by 75 percent through murder and disease, rejection of treaties by the US Congress, resettlement of those who remained onto reservations, prohibition of Yurok language and religious ceremonies, and the forced education of Yurok children at a local fort and later in boarding schools in Southern California and Utah (Yurok Tribe, 2016). Henry interpreted his family members' means of coping with these ongoing dislocations as interwoven with the Indian identity, stating at one point:

I was raised by my whole family, so my aunts, uncles, grandmother, and every person represented what an Indian was. There were heroin addicts, meth addicts, alcoholics, and my aunt always got with women beaters.

Until the age of seven, Henry and his brother lived with their mother in a trailer park on the Yurok Reservation outside of Eureka, a small town nestled in the redwood forests of Northern California. His mother started experimenting with heroine when he was five, and a few years later, his mother's addiction deepened and Henry and his brother were removed from her custody. After a short stint in a foster home, Henry and his brother were placed in his father and grandmother's custody while his mother recovered.

Henry was prohibited from spending time at his friends' homes due to his father's distrust of those outside the family circle. Henry recalls his father teaching him two primary life lessons at a young age, both emphasizing the importance of an extreme form of self-reliance:

Well, from the beginning, was Pops teaching me how to survive. He taught my brother and I how to hurt somebody and kill somebody by the time we were eight. Only in self-defense. Never be the aggressor. And then another one was not to trust anyone. And not to trust a white person, especially ... My pops always said, "You can trust family. But even family fail you sometimes. Even I will fail you one day. So you should be prepared for that." And until this day he has not, but it was always there, that he would fail me someday.

Henry's father's lessons in survival communicated that Henry must learn to rely on himself alone in order to survive, and evidenced an ingrained distrust of others. Stifled by his family's protection and isolationism, and ashamed by the symptoms of their poverty and oppression, Henry entered adolescence in search of an individual identity that would distinguish him from his family. In reflecting on this phase of his life, he stated:

What got me into that lifestyle was just trying to be seen, and trying to be heard, and trying to get my own identity. And it wasn't really my own identity, but it was a different identity from family. And I love my family, and I don't know why I wanted to break off so bad, but it happened.

Like Sparky, Henry also faced disciplinary measures in his high school for truancy, eventually leading to his enrollment in a continuation school. Less than the direct criminalization Sparky

experienced, however, Henry's relationship to school reflects the sense Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) describes in his experience in Baltimore's public schools, that the schools and the streets were "two arms of the same beast" (p. 25). According to this analogy, failure to conform in school justified a young person's abandonment to the streets; and the youth's destruction in the streets was then excused as inevitable by school and law enforcement officials, and society at large, by the fact that he did not stay in school.

Because Henry chose which classes to attend, skipping social science but attending math, science, and the shops, he was expelled from Eureka High School when he missed 17 days of one class. At the high school to which he transferred in the nearby town of Arcata, he began the same routine, until a school counselor took an interest:

And then a counselor came and talked to me, and asked me what was going on ... and the counselor went, "Look, we can turn this all around. You can come in and talk to me anytime you want." So once I started trusting her a little bit, I started going to my classes, pulling my grades up. But then my mom moved back to Eureka, and that's when I went to the continuation school. Because she took me back to Eureka High, and said, "I'd like to enroll my son," and the principal said, "No, Mr. Frank is not welcome here." So the alternative was continuation school. And I made up 9th, 10th, and 11th grade in one year. I don't know what motivated me, but I just knocked it out. I was taking it serious now.

Henry's high school experience suggests that the small intervention made by one concerned counselor could have made a significant difference in his trajectory, but the combination of housing instability and the school administrator's unwillingness to accommodate him given past non-compliance pushed him in a different direction. Just as Henry was cut off from peers and activities associated with the traditional high school experience, he met Dan, a fellow continuation school student, with whom he immediately formed a strong connection and friendship, and who happened to be a gang member.

Not long before Dan and Henry met, Dan had joined the 18th Street Gang, an off-shoot of a Southern California gang which reached Eureka when a young man who had caught a gun charge in Los Angeles was sent to live with his grandparents up north. When they first met, Henry was not particularly interested in Dan's gang; he hung out with Dan simply "cause he was a cool dude." As he spent more time with Dan, however, he was allured by the "glamour and prestige" of his lifestyle, the fact that "everybody was hooking up" without having to spend money on dates, an attractive option given Henry had no money to begin with.

During this period, Henry maintained good grades in his continuation school and worked at the DMV, but he became more attracted to the gang after he was attacked by young men in the area who associated him with the 18th Street Gang:

I was out in what they call the projects up there. And I was walking through. And the Asians, they saw me earlier in the week hanging out with Dan and Will. Now I'm not part of anything, but since they saw me hanging out with them, and they don't like them, they saw me coming through, they jumped me. And it was 30 of them. And they had baseball bats. They really did a number on me. I went to the hospital and all that.

After his recovery, Henry told Dan he wanted to join the gang. Though banding together with other youth provided Henry with protection, it also escalated the ongoing hostilities with other groups of young men in the area and with the Eureka Police Department, who, affronted by what Henry calls his growing "arrogance and ego," began strategically constructing a criminal record to ensure that if Henry was charged with a serious crime, he would receive a long sentence. After a

rival gang composed of Laotian youth committed a drive-by shooting of a house in which Henry was hanging out, Henry was arrested for being the target of the shooting, and adopted a reckless and provocative attitude with the arresting officers:

I was in the interrogation room, and he was like, “Do you want me to record this?” And I was like, “I don’t give a fuck! Whatever you want to do, man, you do.” So he’s like, “Well tell me what happened.” And I’m like, “Well, first of all, a car full of riceballs crept up on me and started shooting at me, and then you motherfuckers arrested me!” And I went on and on. And like I said, I was very arrogant. And at that time, I had a business card that said “Cannabis Sativa Connoisseur” with my phone number, pager, and all that ... I said, “Do you want my card?” And he goes, “You have a card?” And I said, “Yeah I have a card, who doesn’t have a card?” He’s like, “Can I get it?” And I’m like, “Of course!” So I pull it out, and then I’m like, “Hold on, if you can’t reach me here, call this number,” and I put my partner’s number on it, and then I threw it at them, and I bounced out. [pause] And I look back on this and I’m like, “Why was I so retarded?” That’s how arrogant I was at the time.

In addition to his business card and his use of the term “riceball,” the police officers charged Henry with the manufacture, distribution, and trafficking of dangerous weapons for carrying a leather punch keychain he bought at a local convenience store. Henry recalled asking the officer why he was arresting him for a key chain, to which the officer replied:

“Because you’re a fuck up. And we need people to know that so that when it’s time to throw you in jail for life, you never get out.” And I was like, “Whatever.” ‘Cause I thought I was so smooth. I was like, “If all you can get me for is some punk-ass key chain, go for it.” ... But of course, it bit me in the ass. So not only – they didn’t take it as a leather punch, it came back [on my criminal record] as a gun offense.

Henry’s interactions with authority figures in the schools and the police department pushed him deeper into gang involvement, and in the hubris he developed in response to their treatment, he began to find an alternative identity, a way of making a name for himself through recklessness and bravado. In his peer-oriented world, this brash behavior earned him prestige and a valued role in his community.

At the same time, Henry’s life was becoming increasingly unstable as his relationships to family, school, employment, and peers incrementally disintegrated. Henry moved out of his mother’s house into one shared with his friends, a party house where he began binging on methamphetamine for weeks at a time. After inhaling poison oak at a bonfire in the woods during a paintball game, Henry was hospitalized and nearly died, and because he was unable to inform his employers, he lost his job at the DMV. And his relationship with Dan, his best friend and original tie to the 18th Street Gang, was ruptured when Dan killed himself while playing Russian roulette.

Henry’s emotional turmoil was compounded by his inability to mourn his best friend’s death given his need to maintain his reputation of masculine toughness and bravado:

So he was the first person close to me that died ... And I’m not trying to look weak, ‘cause I had this reputation, so I’m not going to sit here and cry for someone who died because he was in the game, because he knew what the consequences are.

Henry’s fear that he would be perceived as weak for mourning Dan’s death speaks to the gendered nature of shame, and his inability to process emotions that he associates with weakness. As his sense of volatility increased, his behavior became even more reckless, and the attention he received even more positive. When the Laotian youth committed a series of drive-bys, targeting him

and his peer group, he capitalized on the opportunity to tempt his own fate and perform his invincibility, gaining a reputation of epic proportions in the process:

So now the drive-by comes along. They're coming by, and I see a carload of them, and I'm like, "Oh, here they go." But then they just drive by, so we kept on walking, and I'm like, "It's all bad." But [the guy I'm with is] like, "You're paranoid, you're paranoid." And we're like one house from getting to my partner's house, and another car comes by. And they stopped at the stop sign, and I seen the guy push the front of it forward, and he starts going, "Blow, blow, blow, blow!" I didn't feel today was my day to die. So my one partner runs around the building, almost gets hit – he almost runs into a bullet. My other partner gets down to the ground, and I just stand up, throw my hands in the air, and start walking towards the car. And I'm like, "Don't let me get to the car," and he's like, "Blam, blam, blam, blam!" And he empties the clip, and I'm still walking towards the car. And then they just take off. And they're like, "You're crazy!" And I'm like, "Nope, today wasn't my day to die!" Buuuuuf! Legend! ... So everybody loved me, everybody wanted to be with me. If something needed to be done, go get Hen. And I thrived off it.

When the Laotian youth committed another drive-by shooting a few months later, this time into a house where Henry's cousin lived with her young children, Henry's friends immediately came to him to mount a retaliation, to "go shoot one of these fucking gooks." Though he hesitated, he eventually agreed to drive the car, assuring himself "no one is going to die tonight" while also knowing that given his reputation, everyone would believe they were "gonna shoot a motherfucker that night."

With Henry driving, his friend Jason in the backseat, and TJ in the passenger's side, they cruised around town seeking a target. After some time went by without seeing anyone, they abandoned the mission, heading to the local mall to pick up girls before returning to the house to party. On his way into the mall, Jason had a brief confrontation with two young Asian men standing outside the entrance, and when the two young men walked over to their uncle to tell him what happened, the uncle raised his hands in the air in a provocative gesture towards Henry and TJ. Before the uncle was able to fully raise his hands in the air, TJ fired at him, hitting the uncle. Jason ran to the car and dived into the backseat as Henry peeled out, shocked and scared, but not letting on. "I was like, 'Yeah, you got that motherfucker,' telling them all kinds of things they wanted to hear, trying to be okay with it," recalled Henry.

When I asked him whether the man they shot was affiliated with the young men who had committed the drive-by, he responded:

Nope, just some random Asian. That's it. And it was on New Years night, at the Bayshore Mall, and the mall was packed. We were in front of a plate glass window like 200 by 400 feet, so it wasn't a big secret, what happened. There were so many witnesses, but we weren't arrested until two and a half months later because they couldn't put it all together. But he just shot right in there. Could've hit anybody. I wasn't connected with that at that point, but I'm connected to it now. Like what happened there from the ripple effect.

At trial, Henry was convicted of conspiracy to attempted murder for his role driving the car, triggering an automatic 25-year-to-life sentence. Because of his use of the term "riceball" while being questioned by police after the first drive-by shooting, he received a four-year hate crime enhancement, leading to a sentence of 29-years-to life in the California prison system, which he began serving at the age of 19.

Conclusion: Shame, Recklessness, and Violence

Sparky and Henry both settled on a similar strategy: to act “crazy” as a means of being perceived in a different light. Katz (1988) and Gilligan (1997) urge those who study crime and violence to pay attention to emotions and to dig beneath the surface of superficial emotional displays. Henry and Sparky’s testimonies suggest the importance of this advice. Though both engaged in aggressive and highly reckless behavior, they are able in retrospect to trace that behavior back to the voids of connection and self-worth they hid from view to conform to traditional expectations of masculinity. The shame they experienced as they were criminalized for breaking school rules, and subjected to punitive and degrading treatment by law enforcement and other adults only served to further push them toward the adoption of aggressive behavior. Their criminalization as marginalized youth in the neoliberal era created the conditions in which they increasingly adopted brazen behavior, which in turn justified their criminalization.

For Sparky, subjected to abuse and neglect in the home, dangerous conditions in his neighborhood, and criminalization in his school, the thrills of criminal behavior provided him with stimulation he sought to counteract the numbing and disassociation otherwise characterizing his daily life. Attacking the first person he could find in juvenile detention was a means of posturing, of hiding his fear and sense of weakness as a “scrawny, skinny little white boy.” The efficacy of this strategy translated into his embrace of violence on the streets, and his immediate and long-term incarceration in juvenile detention. For Henry, recklessly tempting fate was a means of establishing a different identity from family, a way of being seen and heard that was positively valued by his community of peers and contrasted with the fact that in the other pathways he pursued, through school and work, he was treated as disposable. As hostilities escalated among the dislocated youth in his hometown, his reputation for brazenness led to his peers relying on him for support in the dangerous and aggressive way of life they had adopted together. Once he developed this reputation, he found it difficult to turn back.

As Henry began to describe the discoveries he made about himself as he matured within the prison system, he revisited this period of his life. In retrospect, Henry realized, his adolescent self was more invested in his façade than in his actual potential to live a full life out of his fear of showing vulnerability:

For a long time I thought I wasn’t afraid – I wasn’t afraid to die – which is true. At that time, it was more that I was afraid of living and failing at it ... Because in that moment of when I was this person that they made me to be, in their minds, well if I died right then, I’m a legend. But if there comes a time when something happens and I cower, I run, or something like that, then that kills all of it. So I want to die before any of that happened. Not so much want to die, but I’d rather have died before anything like that, just on the top of my game. So that was just sad.

Though Sparky and Henry both adopted violence as a tactic, and are clear that they would have continued in this vain if they had remained on the streets, neither of them sought out violence as an end in and of itself. They were enmeshed in violent circumstances, and in these circumstances, their use of violence was positively valued. For other young men, however, and in the most extreme cases, the power they felt when they first committed violence was intoxicating. They formed a

compensatory connection to violence itself, seeking out the experience of harming others as a means of avoiding their own internal chaos.

CHAPTER THREE:

Raymond and Gabriel - The Pull of Violence

Scholars of addiction have noted what they call a “subculture” addiction – pointing to evidence that for some, the lifestyle composed of the daily activities of seeking money, buying drugs, getting high, coming down, and repeating, is addictive in and of itself, distinct from the addictive qualities of any substance. During “heroin famines” in Vancouver, Canada, for example, Psychologist Bruce Alexander (2008) noticed that the heroin addicts he was treating continued to shoot up with non-addictive substances. He attributes this behavior to something the addicts he worked with had been telling him all along: they were addicted to a *lifestyle*.

Journalist Johann Hari (2015), who interviewed Alexander for his recent book on the “War on Drugs,” *Chasing the Scream*, interprets the appeal of this lifestyle in these terms:

If your problem is being chronically starved of social bonds, then part of the solution is to bond with the heroin itself and the relief it gives you. But a bigger part is to bond with the subculture that comes with taking heroin—the tribe of fellow users all embarked on the same mission and facing the same threats and risking death every day with you. It gives you an identity. It gives you a life of highs and lows, instead of relentless monotony. The world stops being indifferent to you, and starts being hostile—which is at least proof that you exist, that you aren’t dead already (176).

Hari (2015) and Alexander’s (2008) description of the pull of the lifestyle among heroin addicts in Vancouver provides an apt framework for understanding the pull of the violent lifestyle among the marginalized youth of the neoliberal era. For them, the addictive lifestyle was generated by banding together for protection and belonging, and embracing “street life” or “thug life,” whether in the context of gangs, as solo actors, or among groups of friends not necessarily affiliated with official street organizations.

For the “bastards” generation, unlike previous generations of marginalized youth, street life entailed exposure to high levels of gun-related violence. Criminologist Al Blumstein (1995) proposes the spike in youth homicide rates from 1985 to 1992 was a product of the “recruitment of young people into illicit drug markets” (p. 10). He explains, “Because those markets are illegal, the participants must arm themselves for self-protection, and the resulting ‘arms race’ among young people results in a more frequent resorting to guns as a major escalation of the violence that has often characterized encounters among teenage males” (p. 10).

As Blumstein (1995) suggests, violence is the primary form of protection over product, territory, and labor in illegal markets given that legal remedies for conflict resolution – lawsuits and law enforcement – are unavailable. Instead, dealers rely on their reputation and the fear they instill in others to provide a semblance of protection. As a result, violence ratchets to a greater and more dramatic degree as individuals outdo one another in an effort to control their rivals and silence their neighbors through fear and intimidation, as during the prohibition of alcohol in the 1920s when violent mafias arose, competing for territory and shares of the new illicit market.

For youth who began dealing drugs in the 1980s and 90s, exposure to gun violence was part and parcel of the lifestyle. And for some, their first experience of using a gun to intimidate or harm another person offered a form of power and control that overwhelmed their system and to which they returned over and over again. In Raymond and Gabriel’s experience, the motivation to make money that initiated their forays into drug dealing was replaced and layered upon by the power they experienced in instilling fear and harm in their rivals.

Raymond and Gabriel experienced sudden dislocation just as they reached adolescence, which led to their exposure to drug dealing through the adults in their lives. For both, the power they tasted in first using a gun proved overwhelmingly satisfying. A gun enabled Raymond to make the young Mexican-American gang members who humiliated him upon his arrival in the US cower before him. And it provided Gabriel with a sense of control in the midst of extreme volatility. As the volatility and violence of their lives escalated, they increasingly returned to the satisfaction that flooded them from harming others as a compensatory and fleeting but powerful means of assuaging their underlying desperation.

Gabriel's life involved the constant navigation of dualistic roles and extreme environments. When he began telling me his story, he wanted to make sure I understood that it was different. "Most people tell their story going from rags to riches," he began, "and I left from a situation of privilege to not - to the gutter." In describing his privileged lifestyle, he recalled:

I was able to go to private schools, I rode horseback, equestrian lessons; I had aviation lessons ... I went to Hawaii for my – those kind of things. But so in that way, I was very much like the children I went to school with. My friend ... had a birthday in Tahoe, so we all went together to get our little ski outfits, and we matched and all this shit. It was cool. You know what I mean?

Despite being one of the only black students in his private elementary and middle school, Gabriel recalled fitting in seamlessly with his school friends. At the same time, however, this lifestyle required a stressful maintenance of appearances. The large, beautiful home he lived in with his mother and grandparents, his school tuition, and the lavish birthday parties and extracurricular activities were funded by a lucrative cocaine enterprise his grandfather initiated after meeting a Colombian man in prison in the 1970s. And the family business sometimes created awkward situations he found it difficult to navigate as a child:

When you live in that kind of house, you're not supposed to talk about some things just because it's weird. There's [money] sifters everywhere, under counters and stuff, so you couldn't always have a lot of company, or I couldn't explain why I had Alhambra jars full of \$1 bills in my room.

Gabriel's family was also different from those of his school friends given that his extended family was permeated by the economic instability and attenuated relationships associated with high levels of incarceration. When I asked Gabriel if he had any relatives who were incarcerated, he responded:

Yes. Yes ... My uncle, my grandfather, uh, my cousins – *all* my cousins ... brothers, half brothers on my dad's side ... My uncle on that side. So I guess they would be second cousins. But most of the men in my family... have had some type of incarceration.

A defining characteristic of mass incarceration is its exceptionally high impact on African American men with low educational attainment (Western, 2006). Nationally, fully one in three African American men between the ages of 18 and 30 serve time in prisons and jails (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2008). In California, African American adults were incarcerated at a rate of 3,036 per 100,000, compared to 996 for American Indian/Alaska Natives; 757 for Latinos, and 453 for whites

in 2010 (Wagner, 2014). The incarceration rate among African American adult *males*, in particular, was 4,367 per 100,000 in 2013 (Grattet & Hayes, 2015). And, yet, even these shockingly high and disproportionate concentrations across state and national populations fail to capture the level of incarceration that can be concentrated within specific neighborhoods, blocks, and families.

In Gabriel's early years, he was largely buffered from the attenuation of the social bonds in his extended family by his grandparents' wealth. As he approached adolescence, however, the lack of family support he and his mother were able to rely on resulted in a dramatic change of circumstance. As tension and anxiety within his household reached a peak, culminating in his grandmother and grandfather's divorce, his mother, frustrated with her mother and father's dysfunctional behavior as their marriage crumbled, decided to embark on her own for the first time:

My mother's like, "I'm done. I'm not going to deal with this," and she moves out. And we had moved – like we had lived other places before, but never for very long ... but this time, it was like she was done. And I moved to San Francisco's Western Addition, straight up – Fillmo' ... and I had had exposure to street life through my cousins and stuff, but it was kind of like a vacation ... So anyway, yeah, my life changed immediately.

Unlike most wealthy and middle-class families, Gabriel's mother did not have an extended network of similarly situated family members she could rely on for financial support or a place to land as she sorted out her new life. Her decision to separate herself from her parents thus translated into an extreme shift from luxury to financial stress and isolation. The move also disconnected Gabriel from his grandfather, who he considered his "papa," his primary male role model, and from his school friends, with whom he "had nothing in common anymore." He recalled, "That's when you start seeing stolen mopeds; you start seeing me acting out in classes."

As Gabriel and his mother began their new life in the Fillmore, their relationship changed. The Fillmore is a historic neighborhood in San Francisco, first settled by Jewish and Japanese immigrants. When Japanese residents were forced into internment camps south of the city during World War II, the housing they left vacant was filled largely by African American workers and families as they migrated to seek employment on the shipyards and in other industries. During this period, the Fillmore earned a reputation as "Harlem West" for its vibrant night life and jazz clubs, and was home to a mixed income community. It was also the site of urban uprisings in the late 1960s, devastating "urban renewal" projects displacing neighborhood residents, and economic decline, as industries dried up and where stable jobs were eliminated or shipped overseas in the 1970s (KQED, 2016). When Gabriel and his mother moved into an apartment complex in the heart of the neighborhood in the early 1990s, neighborhood residents sometimes referred to the Fillmore as the "no more" (KQED, 2016). It was in this phase that he became the "man in his house," and his mother began relying on him at times to serve as her protector. It was also during this phase that his exposure to drug dealing and adoption of violence began.

A neighbor provided Gabriel with his first direct experience drug dealing, and in describing his lifestyle at the age of 13 and 14, when he was exclusively focused on selling drugs, Gabriel recalls:

At first it was a prestige thing. We're selling dope to buy school clothes and sneakers and chains because we're young. You know what I mean? I had cars without a license ... The high school girls loved me. I'm like a kid, like, "I'm grown. I've got money in my pocket. I've got some jewelry. I got a car. I've got weed in my car." You know what I'm saying? "What's up?" And they're like, "Okay." We'd go get a hotel room, straight up – "I got the money."

Though his forays into drug dealing were spurred at first by the financial motivation, this changed for Gabriel when one of his close friends was shot, escalating his already aggressive tendencies. Gabriel and his new neighborhood friends began embarking on strong-arm missions across town. At some point, a friend of his recklessly suggested they rob someone in their own neighborhood, and they did it, so full of bravado they neglected to wear masks or otherwise disguise their identities. The people they robbed, recognizing them from the area, retaliated shortly thereafter, shooting one of Gabriel's close friends in the back. In this pivotal moment, the intensity of Gabriel's life sharply escalated:

We've got to answer for this shit. So we were live and direct. Everywhere we go, I'm strapped, big metal ... And then, I guess the thing that really tripped me out about the gun thing was ultimately, it was power. It was a power like I had never experienced in my life. When I really got my first taste of blood, it was done because I had – I was like Jesus, almost like God. I felt like I was God because ... I'll take something from you that you're not willing to give. I promise you ... Like really telling these niggas [drinking and playing dice] outside [my front door], "Yeah, I'm doing you a favor right now, bitch, by lettin' you breathe. How about that? Now move that shit down to another corner before I fuck you up." But I'm *serious*, though.

As the intensity ratcheted up, and consequences became lethal, Gabriel's drug dealing lifestyle was replaced by "gun play." The powerful highs he experienced in wielding a gun and committing violence were accompanied by a rising volatility and sense of insecurity as he was no longer able to stay in one place, to move freely in the neighborhood, or to sell drugs out of fear of retaliation:

And then, when you start playing that game, it's a different game to be played. So now I'm beefed up. Now my whole world's fucked up. I can't get money because everywhere I'm always wondering if somebody's following me – if a car rolls up, who's in the car. I've got to be on all this shit all the time. I've got to be on this shit.

As Gabriel continued pursuing a violent lifestyle, defined by trauma, paranoia, and the inability to feel secure, he found that harming others served as a powerful means of re-establishing his sense of control. He developed an attachment to wielding power over others to avoid and compensate for the pain and desperation consuming him in daily life. Thus, he adopted a behavioral pattern that coincides neatly with the definition of addiction as "any repeated behavior, substance-related or not, in which a person feels compelled to persist, regardless of its negative impact on his life and the lives of others" (Maté, 2007, p. 224).

As his involvement in high stakes violence escalated, Gabriel's mother became increasingly aware of his violent activity and desperate to prevent it:

So my mother's like – my poor mother...She lives with a fucking killer. She knows that I walk around with guns on me, but what is she going to do? Take them from me? So she just kind of has to sit there and eat it ... Then she'll try to do a little game ... little things like, [making an open-armed hugging gesture] "Oh, hey," because she's trying to pat me down. And I'm telling her, "Why don't you stop because I know what you're doing." Like, "If that's the game you want to play, yes, I'm strapped. You going to get out your car?" Type of thing. And she'd be like, "Well, no. You're my son." She's found guns in my car and tried to throw them away – just crazy shit. Insane. Insane.

The cycles of retaliatory violence in which he and his friends engaged also impacted the circle of people with whom he had grown up, often directly:

Remember, this is such a closed circle. These are the same people that we used to grow up ... playing basketball and playing Midnight League and all this other – these are the same people, and now we’re all trying to kill each other. We’re like 19-, 20-year-olds running around ... And now I’ve got *hellof* issues because it’s like I’m suffering from PTSD, but it’s not postal – it’s active because I’m always leaving one traumatic situation for another. All our friends now are all basically doing – any of my friends even childhood friends from my grandmother’s house – they’re with a different faction, but everybody’s basically – I don’t know how to explain it.

Gabriel’s friends and community members from growing up – people he went to school with, played basketball with, and hung out with at his grandmother’s house – at this point were allied with different small factions across San Francisco and involved in a series of interconnected rivalries and retaliations, forming a collective experience of violence and trauma that indelibly marked their lives. In reflecting on this volatile phase of life, Gabriel stated:

Now it’s like my shit is just so out of control. I know this ain’t right, though. This can’t be right. I’m like, “This can’t be – my life isn’t right.” I’m in so much pain and all this shit. It makes me feel good to hurt other people, though.

The power and satisfaction Gabriel feels from shooting and killing other people serves to temporarily assuage the desperation and pain that otherwise encompassed his life. Having fallen – or perhaps having jumped – into a destructive cycle in which the violence he committed ratcheted up his desperation by placing an active target on his back, the most readily available means he could find to alleviate his chaotic emotions and pain was to commit more violence.

This addiction to a violent lifestyle, despite its obvious destructiveness, is real. Even when Gabriel was finally able to pull himself into a different environment, as soon as he was exposed to his triggers once again, he relapsed, resulting in his incarceration. Gabriel started working in settings where no one would expect to find him. When he got a job working as a counselor at a summer camp, he made friends with a young British man who invited him to come back to the UK to stay with his family. Gabriel and his mother immediately jumped at the opportunity for him to leave town, and when he fell in love with a British woman, Gabriel spent the next two years in the UK. Under her influence, he became reinvested in school, and began studying for the SAT. When he and his wife moved back to San Francisco, however, where she had secured a position in the finance industry, familiar faces and patterns began to reemerge in his life, and he was unable to pull himself away from the dual lifestyle he had always lived.

Gabriel began operating a small side operation selling marijuana, and when a friend who served as his delivery person was assaulted twice by one of Gabriel’s old rivals, Gabriel retaliated. “Because remember,” he reminded me, “This is all I’ve been doing and much worse ... I’m fully active when it comes to this. Second nature.” Gabriel asked his cousin to drive him to his rival’s house, and he shot the man in the leg, but was interrupted before he was able to shoot him again. Gabriel jumped in the getaway car and hid out in his house. Two days later, the police kicked in the door.

After a lengthy legal battle involving several of the biggest names in criminal defense in San Francisco, Gabriel was sentenced to six years in the California prison system for attempted murder in the second degree.

Like Gabriel, the primary dislocation in Raymond's life occurred at the age of 12, when he migrated with his parents and younger sister from Guatemala to Gilroy, a small city in an agricultural region between San Jose and the Salinas Valley. When they settled in the US, Raymond's father started drinking less, and though they entered a period of stability as a family, Raymond continually referenced the silence that existed between him and his father throughout our interview.

Raymond developed a fatherly connection with one of the coaches at a local boxing gym, helping fill the void he experienced in his home life. It just so happened that the coach's extended family was connected to the Nuestra Familia prison gang, as well as to supply lines for marijuana and cocaine in Mexico. When Raymond started high school in Morgan Hill, a more affluent town just north of Gilroy, he encountered a well-funded and seemingly infinite demand for the drugs his connections in Gilroy could provide in ample supply. Previous to his arrival, the kids in Raymond's high school bought drugs in a nearby housing project, and were sometimes robbed in the process, which Raymond attributes to them being "preppy white guys," some of whom were "really dorky." When Raymond began serving as a the middle-man between these kids and his contacts in Gilroy, the one thing he didn't expect was that "These dorks had older brothers that were in college, and they had uncles, and the uncles had more friends. And these dorks opened up a lot of doors for me."

"The next thing you know," Raymond continued, "My pager is vibrating from like 9 in the morning all the way to like – I had to literally put my foot down and say, '11pm in the weekdays – 11:00 I take no more calls.'" Raymond's desire for the wealth necessary to fit in and earn positive attention in his affluent high school was the initial motivation for drug dealing. Like the heroin addicts Alexander (2010) describes, however, and similar to Gabriel's progression from the allure of money to the allure of violence, Raymond was also explicit that beyond the financial incentives of drug dealing, it was the pull of the "lifestyle" that kept him going:

When I started selling drugs, I realized that people were treating me different now, like I was important, and that became like my high. The rationalization I used was, I said, "Okay, I'm going to sell drugs, and when I get my car, I'm going to buy a nice car, and then I'll stop." And then I bought a nice car; I bought a Mustang GT T-top, and then I was like, "Well, this car is kind of old. Let me buy a newer car," and I bought a Z28 Camaro. And it was nice; it had rims. But it's like, "No, but it's got to be something a little bit better." But then it became about, "Well, you know what? I'm making really, really good money here, and it's easy. Why don't I just start my own business, and then I'll stop because once I've got my own business, then I really don't need to commit crimes anymore because I'll have that income coming in" ... But then it was always one more goal before I stopped.

And then it just became ... more of like, "This is who I am, and now this is who I have to be, because if I stop doing this, I won't be important anymore. I just won't get the VIP treatment that I get right now. And I love having a driver, and I love people fearing me and looking up to me, and I love not having to stand in line for anything." I fell in love with that lifestyle, so I couldn't stop anymore. I didn't even *try* to stop anymore once I settled into it.

Raymond continued to build his drug dealing enterprise, operating as an independent entrepreneur outside the gangs by which he was surrounded and for which he developed a passionate hatred. When I asked him why he hated gang members so much, Raymond described his disdain for their tendency to pick on people who were weaker than them, and to start fights in groups, rather than one-on-one. At the core of the hatred, however, was the personal humiliation

he experienced at their hands, which he referenced multiple times in the interview: “When I came to the US, the only people that ever called me a *wetback* were Mexican American gang-looking kids.”

This hatred for gang members led to the overwhelming sense of power Raymond experienced when he first wielded a gun. At age 15, Raymond decided to buy a gun as a means of protecting the money he had begun compiling. He bought a .38 Special – a “five-bullet, small, barely fits in your hand kind of gun” – from a friend of a friend for \$100. When I asked him when he first got a gun, he replied in an unexpectedly dramatic fashion:

Ooh, the romance with the weapon. Yeah, the weapon became like my girlfriend. Yeah, you see my face when I talk about it ... Yeah. The weapon is very special – the weapon, the relationship. Yes.

And in continuing to explain how this love affair developed, he recalled:

So these gang members are hanging out, and some of them were looking at my sister, and they were making some comments in Spanish. So I looked at one of them, like, “You just didn’t say that, mother flower.” I just gave him a dirty look, and he just did one of those shoulder kind of a, “What?” And so ... I pulled out the .38 Special, and I aimed it right at his head. And everybody’s face changed in that group. And it was about maybe eight gang members and a few girls. But everybody’s face just changed.

... So I pulled this gun out in broad daylight. It was maybe about two in the afternoon or so, public, and I got away with it and realized that people would cry when you pull this out. Like these macho tough guys – they start crying when I pull this gun out. And because when you see the fear in people’s faces, it’s an amazing thing. It was an amazing thing for me.

In wielding a gun for the first time, Raymond was able to transform the residual sting from the humiliation he experienced under the gaze of gang-involved youth into an overwhelming sense of satisfaction, a burning up of shame through the righteous protection of his younger sister and the “amazing” sense of power he felt through instilling fear. “So that’s when I think I fell in love with the gun,” Raymond continued, describing his entrance into the kind of “arms race” to which Blumstein (1995) attributes the spiking youth homicide rates of this era:

And then I couldn’t get enough of them. I wanted bigger ones and all kinds of different ones ... And then I started getting the bulletproof gear, also, like the vest and the jackets, anything bulletproof that I could find because my thinking was ... if I have people and I have guns and I could move faster than you, then maybe I could act before you do and maybe get the upper hand somehow. So I always tried to stockpile weapons.

Beyond these pragmatic concerns, however, Raymond also discovered that simply the suggestion of violence and brazenness could go a long way. The larger and shinier the weapon, he discovered, the more effective it was in preemptively paralyzing his potential rivals:

But then I got a .357 Ruger and a .357 Smith & Wesson – that one was stainless steel; the other one was chrome. But then that’s when I learned about also that the way the gun looks – it has a lot to do – if you’re not going to just kill somebody, really, the reason you carry it is psychological. It’s because you want to create that fear ... I had experiences where I pulled a 9mm Smith & Wesson, and people thought it was a toy, and they showed no fear. Then I had to shoot it at them to get a reaction from them ... So that’s when I learned about if I’m

going to go scare somebody, let me get the .357 or something that looks menacing like that. But if I'm really just going to go do a job where it's going to be a shootout, then that's when I get a 9mm or any kind of clip action kind of gun where you have more firepower. But psychologically, though, sometimes you want to go with the look. So the metal, chrome, or stainless steel psychologically worked more for me with my rivals.

This romance with the weapon translated into a growing enjoyment Raymond experienced at using his guns to instill fear and pain in his enemies. Like Gabriel, Raymond's life entered a kind of whirlwind, in which the use of violence became more and more routine. When I asked him about the degree to which violence formed part of his daily life in his teenage years, he replied:

Unfortunately, it was not necessary, I think. But I enjoyed it, so I created it in a lot of ways. So yeah, I would do favors for people sometimes where I would pick people up and put them in my car, in the trunk, whatever, and take them places to scare them or whatever. Whatever problem there was, it was like they would call me, like, "Hey, Raymond, could you go pick this guy up for me and bring him?" or "Can you take him over here," or whatever. And I used to do those things really for fun because I didn't have to. And I had people that would do stuff like that for me, but I used to love doing it myself. I just used to get a kick out of it. It was like a high, too.

As Raymond sank deeper into the whirlwind of power, money, and intimidation, he attached to the sensations he experienced in the highs and lows of this lifestyle while neglecting other parts of himself. It was only in the moment that he committed the act for which he was ultimately convicted that he experienced a reconnection to the relationships he had been neglecting all along.

In the height of a three-year phase of escalating violence and criminality, Raymond developed a particular passionate hatred for a young man who had taken an interest in his sister, who, not surprisingly, happened to be in a gang. When the young man called their house late one night, and mocked Raymond when Raymond told him not to call after 9pm, Raymond was "deeply offended." About an hour later, Raymond showed up at the young man's house, and when he opened the front door, Raymond started shooting:

So I just start shooting, and he managed to shut the door on me, thank God. So I hit him three times, but then – well, later, I found out I hit him three times because I didn't – because I shot him towards his chest. I'm trying to shoot him point blank in the heart, pretty much. And I knew I hit him the first time, but after he slammed the door, I just kept shooting.

And when my gun ran out of bullets, I actually had an impulse to pop the other clip and kick the door open just to make sure he was dead, and I heard, like, a baby crying. And it sounded like it was coming from inside the house. It was loud, too. Babies can get really loud. And it kind of snapped me out because by then ... it was hard to come out for breath and just be a human being again.

And when I heard the baby crying, it just kind of hit me, like, "Dude, you're a real monster, man," like, "You really are sick." But then, it's like, "Oh, man, well, how can I rewind and take it back? I can't erase this picture anymore. Man, what did I just do?" kind of thing. Like, "Oh, gosh, I hope I didn't hit somebody in the house," because I didn't even think about – before doing it, I didn't really care enough to think about, "Well, is it possible that there's people in that house that you could get?" Duh!

A week later, after laying low in his parents' house waiting for the police to arrive and feeling depressed and disgusted with himself, Raymond took a risk and went to hang out with some friends. Instead of the usual comfort in being surrounded by people who were "loyal" and gave him the recognition and attention he desired, he started to feel isolated and threatened, and was overcome by a compelling need to go home to his mother. When he arrived at home, he encountered his father on the couch, and they had an unusual interaction:

My father was drinking his beers, but he didn't seem that drunk. He seemed more really worried because by then, they knew that the kid had been shot, and they knew that it had to be me, even though I wasn't admitting it to anyone. But my mom knew it had to be me, and he did, too. And I guess it was difficult for him just to see me like, "Whoa, you're really horrible now," kind of thing.

But it's like, "Dad, haven't you been living with me here? Haven't you seen all these guns and money, and there's people that follow me all the time? What?" And I sat, because I usually didn't really communicate with my dad at all. We had this distance for years where we didn't say a word to each other. And I sat next to him, and I handed him a beer. And I was waiting for some kind of, "Are you going to say something," or "What do you want?"

And he didn't say anything at all. He just looked at me, and he just didn't say anything. So after I stared at him, something that is very weird and very unusual for our family – for me to stare at my father in the face like this. It doesn't happen ... I was just, like, challenging him, is really what I was doing. Like, "What? Are you going to say something now? Say something, mother f---er. What? You haven't said nothing to me in three frickin' years. Are you going to say something now?"

I wasn't saying it, but that was the exchange. But he wasn't really saying anything. He was just really quiet. And so eventually, I got up after a few minutes, and I went to my room.

In this moment of desperation, Raymond attempts to make a connection with his father, whose attention he has been missing throughout his adolescence. Raymond's adoption of a lifestyle involving drug dealing and its attendant violence may have been a provocation to his father, a means of testing how far he could go and how desperate his life could become before his father said a word to him.

When Raymond went to his room, he considered suicide, but called a girlfriend instead, and fell asleep while on the phone with her. He woke up early the next morning to the sounds of dogs barking and the phone off the hook, and realized the house was surrounded by a SWAT team. For a moment, he considered running, but decided against it, concerned about protecting his mother from witnessing him die "a very violent death and shot up and all that." Instead, Raymond sat quietly in his room as several narcotics agents and a sheriff broke down the door to his bedroom. He obediently lay on the floor as they handcuffed him and put him in the police car. He surrendered.

In 1996, at the age of 18, Raymond pled guilty to attempted murder in the second degree and received a sentence of 19 years in California prisons. In reflecting back on the moment that broke the spell of his three-year whirlwind, Raymond stated:

When I heard the baby crying, I think I heard the baby in me crying, saying, "You really just forgot about me now. You forgot that you're a baby, too." And it's like, "I'm trying to cry, but you're not really listening," kind of thing.

When Raymond heard the baby crying, he reconnected to a part of himself that he had sublimated. And in the same moment, he connected to the young man who he had shot as well. He was no longer able to separate the young man he had full intention of killing from the young man's mother, siblings, and children, the broader circle of care, the web of family and community to which the young man belonged. And in the same moment, Raymond reconnected to the part of himself that he had been denying all along – the part of him that was neither protagonist of a righteous drama nor king of loyal subjects, but a vulnerable child seeking his mother's care and his father's attention. In this moment of self-discovery, he began to be able to mourn and grieve for himself, and his journey toward healing, in the improbable context of the expanding California prison system, began.

Conclusion: Compensatory Intimacy, Collective Violence, and Collective Trauma in the Neoliberal Era

Gabriel and Raymond both experienced severe dislocation and volatility, and both adopted violence as a means of compensating for and alleviating the pain in their lives. Gabriel's volatile home life translated into brazenness on the street, and once he got a "taste of blood," he continued to return to the use of violence to assuage his growing desperation. Once this connection formed, it was difficult to shake loose. Even after marrying a woman who encouraged him to find a new direction, when he was back in familiar territory, the pull of his previous lifestyle continued beckoning him, and he incrementally slipped back into it. Raymond became aware of his profound dislocation from self only in the moment that he committed the act that would result in his incarceration. When he heard the baby crying, he was suddenly able to connect to the parts of himself he had been neglecting, and he was able to recognize how his violent and destructive actions impacted not only the individuals who served as his targets, but the entire social circle in which they were enmeshed.

Though only a very small percentage of people are involved in the high levels of lethal violence which can and do erupt in pockets across the US (e.g., Kennedy et. al., 1997; Rios, 2011), the impact of this small circle of individuals involved in lethal violence filters down, and in this sense, families, neighbors, and broader social circles can become deeply entangled in the collective experience of this violence.

Collective trauma is experienced by "any society, ethnic group, social category or class which has been exposed to extreme circumstances of traumatization, such as natural disasters, technological catastrophes, and social, political, cultural, gender, ethnic or religious persecution, that leave them with life-long problems" (Robben & Suarez-Orozco, 2000, p. 24). It is characterized in part by the destruction of "fundamental cultural norms and kinship ties" (Robben & Suarez-Orozco, 2000, p. 11). And it is an "axiomatic fact" that "large-scale violence takes place in complex and over-determined socio-cultural contexts which intertwine psychic, social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions" (Robben & Suarez-Orozco, 2000, p. 1). In other words, in situations where collective violence erupts, numerous causal factors – ranging from broad political and economic policies to specific psychological responses – are present, each of which *on its own* could produce the outcome of violence and its traumatic effects.

In the context of neoliberal social abandonment and the investment in criminalization, the "bastards" generation was exposed to the over-determined socio-cultural contexts in which collective violence and trauma erupts. In these contexts, individual involvement in violence encompasses a wider set of roles than is typically acknowledged in the philosophy and policies governing criminal justice contexts; one individual, depending on the moment, setting, and venue,

may shift among the roles of witness, victim, participant, and perpetrator (Western, 2015). The experience of violence conceived of in this way is broader than the typical conceptualization which limits those involved in violence to the dichotomous roles of victims and perpetrators, and which generally conceives of individuals as conforming to one of these static roles. Instead, individuals play different roles at different moments in their lives, and can switch between them as a particular event unfolds.

The “bastards” testimonies reveal the striking extent to which each man was bound to his friends, family, and community through interconnected experiences of witnessing, being victimized by, and committing acts of violence, as well as the pain, stress, and emotional desperation they experienced in the process. Collective trauma and violence encompasses exposure to violence broadly defined – not just the person who committed a shooting, or the people shot, but the cousins, the younger brothers, the people in the crowd, the family members of everyone involved who will deal with the repercussions of the trauma they have experienced, the people who were questioned or otherwise approached by police officers trying to determine who committed the shooting, the business owners whose stores were located nearby and whose sense of security in their neighborhood are impacted.

In the already vulnerable neighborhoods where violence and incarceration are concentrated, the trauma that develops from witnessing and experiencing routine violence transfers from one reactive person to the next, cycling among family and community members. The dislocation individuals experience as their social networks and sense of community crumbles is replaced by emotional patterns – the highs and lows, the losses of loved ones and the retaliations – that can carry a compulsive pull. The habitual groove deepens each time a retaliatory cycle begins or an opportunity to intimidate and harm another person arises.

As dislocation, internalized shame and oppression, and violent activity compound on each other, feelings become numbed. As one man put it in describing the two shootings for which he was caught:

I had already just, like, lost it. I had lost my, my whole – I didn’t give a fuck anymore at this point. I was just like, you know, if someone were to say something to me, I would just, I would just lose it. I was really just tired of people, tired of people with their attitude, with their bullshit.

For each of these young men, dislocation in family and community led to shame and anger, which, without productive channels for processing, evolved into their adoption of some form of compensatory attachment, whether to patriarchal role over family, to gang, to an identity built on recklessness, or to violence itself.

The “bastards” lives soon intertwined through their experience of incarceration in an era characterized by systems expansion. As they prepared to enter jails and prisons, the already complicated family and community relationships they developed were attenuated and reconfigured. Some left behind children and romantic partners on the street, as well as siblings, cousins, mothers, and fathers. And some reunited with friends and relatives inside the jails and prisons in which they were confined. Ironically, perhaps, some, eventually, found inside prison the mentors and caring adults they had lacked in their childhoods and adolescences.

PART TWO: NEOLIBERAL PENALITY, SYSTEMS EXPANSION, & STRATEGIES OF CONTROL

Elizabeth Lombardi was recruited to work as a correctional officer within San Quentin Prison in 1978 as she was preparing to graduate from Sonoma State University with a Bachelor's in Criminal Justice. She recalled how the recruiters represented the prison system as "in the middle of revolution." The field was becoming more professional, they said, and they were looking for more social work types to become correctional officers. Elizabeth's father had friends who had served time at San Quentin during alcohol prohibition, and she recalled how her father and his friends would laugh about their prison experiences when stories would come up around the dinner table. "So I grew up around people who had been in prison and were now successful business men," she told me. "And so I didn't go there with any fear at all."

For the first year and a half that Elizabeth worked at San Quentin, the climate was relatively calm. They were planning to close a vacant housing unit. Prisoners carried schoolbooks. And though there was violence, it was largely contained in the "lock-up units." She became more afraid, however, as "the inmates were changing ... when we started seeing the gang members, from LA primarily, who were *so* angry and *so* violent – they're 17 or 18 years old, and they have sentences that are 25 to life."

Elizabeth witnessed the flooding of the prison system with the generation of "bastards," the dislocated, angry and traumatized progeny of the neoliberal era. In the next few years, the housing unit slotted for closure was re-opened, a "tent city" was constructed to confine overflow population, and the overcrowding that became typical in the era of mass incarceration began.

"It was pretty horrible," Elizabeth continued. "They put me in A-section...there was 500 inmates in there and only two staff on the ground, a gunman in the air." And at that time, the training and equipment for correctional officers was minimal: "You went through five days of orientation and they put you in the house ... If you wanted handcuffs, you had to buy them yourself. They gave you a whistle."

When I asked her what she thought was responsible for escalating violence within California's prisons in the early 1980s, Elizabeth responded:

Overcrowding. When you look at San Quentin, you've got five-tier housing units, blind spots everywhere. It's easy to get killed. I mean, honestly. If someone wants to stab you, they're going to stab you. If someone wants to kill you, they're going to kill you. Hardly any correctional officers ... People just started looking for how to protect themselves, so it just proliferated – the gangs. And staff couldn't protect you. I mean, staff couldn't protect you! *We* were trying to protect *each other*. So that's how it happened. Too many people, too young, doin' too much time, sent to places that weren't designed for any of this.

Over the next three decades, as Elizabeth worked her way up the career ladder in the California Department of Corrections, California's prison system expanded from just over 21,000 individuals in 1978 when she first started to just under 170,000 individuals by 2005 (CDC, 1978; CDCR, 2010). Over this period, the "revolution" the recruiters discussed to convince Elizabeth to join the department was reversed. The rehabilitative philosophy guiding prison management in earlier eras of penal history was abandoned, and the "strategies of control" (Messinger, 1969) used to implement it were replaced by a contradictory set of strategies that abdicated control to prisoner organizations and then punished individuals for their involvement in the ensuing conflicts and tensions that arose as these organization competed for access to resources.

In Part Two, I examine the “strategies of control” adopted by the California Department of Corrections in the era of neoliberal penalty as the rehabilitative philosophy underlying prison management in earlier eras of penal history was abandoned. Criminologist Sheldon Messinger authored his graduate dissertation on the California prison system in a previous era of systems expansion. Between 1944 and 1965, the prison population in California rose from 6,000 to 27,000 individuals, quadrupling while the states’ general population only doubled (Messinger, 1969, p. 292). Messinger pointed to the creation of the California Department of Corrections in 1944 as a pivotal moment in the transformation of individual prison “congeries” into a network of prisons managed by a central administration, which was itself situated within a broader network of law enforcement, criminal and juvenile justice, and mental health systems (1969, p. 21). Rather than studying how individual prisons fulfilled their societally assigned objectives, Messinger (1969) departed from much of the prison-focused social science of the time by instead studying the system in which individual prisons operate.

Messinger (1969) argues that a focus on “strategies of control” is essential to developing an understanding of prisons because the “daily workaday world confronted by prison officers at all levels moves their attention persistently to the issue of control of inmates in prison” (p. 289). Messinger recognized control as a straightforward relation of domination, involving “finding ways to get others to do or not to do something you want them to do when it is known or assumed that the others want to do otherwise” (290). Strategies of control, then, are “patterns of action designed to have this effect” (290).

Building on Messinger’s insights into the strategies implemented under the rehabilitative paradigm, I trace how these strategies disintegrated and were replaced by an alternative set of strategies that dramatically altered the lived experience of incarceration. In Chapter Four, I trace the dismantling of the indeterminate sentencing regime and the stark shifts in sentencing policy and practice contributing to the primary characteristics defining mass incarceration: the expansion of the prison population, the imposition of extremely long sentences, and the concentration of incarceration by class, race, and geography. In Chapter Five, I argue that the individualized treatment plans used to classify incoming prisoners and assign them to a “home” institution in the rehabilitative era were replaced by a process of *institutional racialization* which imposed artificial group identities onto incoming prisoners and institutionalized the power and influence of the prisoner organizations governing these groups. In Chapter Six, I analyze three additional strategies prison officials implemented formally or informally as negative sanctions for participation in “prison politics,” which replaced the incentives for good behavior prison officials administered in the previous era. As such, the strategies implemented under neoliberal penalty contradicted one another, funneling individuals into categories that strengthened the hold of prison gangs and then punishing them for their association with these gangs. The specific sanctions imposed – including the use of force, lockdowns, and highly restrictive prison design – increased the dislocation and isolation of the people incarcerated in California’s prisons, working against the construction of meaningful connections to self, others, and a path.

The generation of “bastards” who helped fill California’s rapidly expanding prisons faced a highly complicated, dangerous, and contradictory reality they did their best to quickly learn to navigate. Though some of these young people found ways to swim upstream and to resist the coercion and allure of the “prison politics” dominating their social world, they swam against a powerful tide generated by institutional policy and informal but often rigidly enforced social norms. Others, however, without hope of meaningful and long-lasting contact with family, or of leading a life on the streets; with little ability to envision a future outside of prison; and with limited options for earning prestige through other avenues such as college or a vocational trade, adapted to the environment which would serve as their home for the foreseeable future. They sought meaning and

honor within the political environment in which they were confined, knowing that they would die building a reputation for themselves, and settling for the glory that they hoped they would earn in the process.

CHAPTER FOUR: *The Abandonment of the Rehabilitative Ideal*

Since its inception, the American penal experiment was considered a beacon of progressivism for its emphasis on penitence and rehabilitation, though the extent to which these goals were implemented in practice and the strategies and techniques used to implement them varied widely and were at times abandoned altogether (McLennan, 2008; Irwin, 1980; Rothman, 1971; Ayers, 1984). In the 1950s and 1960s, however, particularly in California, prisons entered a phase Sociologist John Irwin (1980) terms the “Correctional Institution,” in which officials re-embraced the rehabilitative ideal and engaged with social scientists and educators to provide opportunities for education and therapy to California’s incarcerated population. The Department of Corrections fully adopted the language and procedures adhering to the rehabilitative ideal in the 1950s and 1960s; new prisons were euphemistically labeled “training facilities” and “men’s colonies,” for example, and “the hole” became the “adjustment center” (Irwin, 1980).

The indeterminate sentence served as a lynchpin to the rehabilitative ideal. Under the indeterminate sentencing paradigm, individuals were subject to indefinite periods of confinement with a minimum requirement for time served. Indeterminate – or “life” – sentences allowed for incarcerated individuals’ release to parole supervision if a board of officials found they met certain established criteria indicating good conduct and adherence to the treatment plan. Messinger (1969) reviewed changes in sentencing laws in California over the late 1800s to mid-1900s, arguing that these changes reveal prison officials consistently sought to make sentencing a useful means of controlling prisoner behavior by increasing discretion over prison terms such that they could be used as rewards and punishments and lodging discretion with those operating the prisons themselves (p. 30). And though Messinger points out that officials were less successful in maintaining discretion over sentencing, until the late 1970s indeterminate sentences remained in place as a means of incentivizing prisoners to participate in the array of rehabilitative programming offered during the “Correctional Institution” era.

In this chapter, I briefly trace the changes in sentencing policy that led to the massive expansion of the California prison system in the neoliberal era. A series of historical developments internal and external to the prison system resulted in a significant reduction in the percentage of individuals upon whom indeterminate sentences were imposed; in its place, a slew of new sentencing policies stemming from the “War on Drugs” and the “tough on crime” political rhetoric of the 1980s and 1990s served to increase the prison population by expanding the types of crimes for which an individual could be incarcerated in state prisons and increasing the length of the sentences they could serve.

In *Prisons in Turmoil*, Sociologist John Irwin (1980), who himself served five years in California prisons in the 1950s, described the eagerness with which members of the prisoner population grasped at the therapeutic programs promoted by the prison administration, embracing reading, writing, and group therapy, and developing a critical consciousness through which they questioned the State as well as the criminal identities to which they had previously adhered. As the 1960s unfolded, California prisons, particularly San Quentin, Folsom, and Soledad, emerged as central sites of radical organizing, intellectual thought, and the struggles for equality and liberation characterizing the Black and Brown Power movements (Berger, 2015). During this era, prisoners organized themselves into numerous groups advocating for their rights, including a prisoners union which organized a work strike at Folsom prison in 1970 involving over 2400 men. This collective

activism, sought “an end to the injustice suffered by all prisoners, regardless of race, creed, or color” (Berger, 2015, p. 1). Prisoners also founded numerous organizations along racial and ethnic lines as a means of providing mutual aid and protection from exploitation (Davidson, 1974). This tumultuous period involved numerous moments of political uprising and solidarity among prisoners as well as phases of increased tension and hostility.

The media attention the uprisings within Attica and San Quentin garnered placed prisons on central stage in the popular imagination, both as a site of leftist hopes for progress and liberation and as dangerous sites of militant revolutionary organizing that alarmed law and order conservatives. The ideologies and critiques of these groups converged in one arena as the decade of the 1970s progressed: the indeterminate sentencing structure. In 1975, a national study analyzing the efficacy of rehabilitative interventions within prisons concluded that “nothing works,” galvanizing prison advocates and critics long frustrated for different reasons with the arbitrariness of indeterminate sentencing (Garland, 2001). While conservative critics were concerned that prisoners were being coddled in therapeutic environments and given lenient sentences, leftist critics pointed to systemic racism in parole board’s decisions of early release. This coalescence led to the broad replacement of indeterminate sentences across the country by a new paradigm emphasizing “determinate” sentences of fixed length. In California, the Determinate Sentencing Law was passed in 1976 (Weisberg et. al., 2011). Between 1978 and 1980, just as Elizabeth was beginning her career at San Quentin, the percentage of men in California serving determinate sentences grew from 36 to 74 percent of the total male incarcerated population (CDC, 1980, p. 93), and for these individuals, the incentives to participate in “treatment” were largely eliminated.

In 1973, the prison population began the sharp and consistent rise characterizing mass incarceration (Zimring, 2005). This rise occurred along the dimensions of breadth – a capturing of a greater array of individuals convicted for a greater array of crimes into the carceral net – and along the dimension of depth – an increase in the lengths of sentences individuals served.

Criminologist Franklin Zimring (2005) categorizes prison population increases under neoliberal penalty into three phases disaggregated based on the primary legal mechanisms contributing to growth. He identifies patterns in the decision-making of legal actors as crucial mechanisms of growth in each phase, painting a portrait conjuring the image of a set of valves leading to prison, all of which, in previous eras of penal history, were impeded by various mechanisms, and all of which suddenly were switched to full force.

From 1973 to the mid-1980s, incarcerated rates rose primarily along the dimension of breadth. The primary driver of increased incarceration rates was the behavior of legal actors, particularly prosecutors’ and judges’ increased tendency to sentence convicted people to prison as opposed to probation – the “in/out decision.” Though many states reformed sentencing policies to emphasize determinate rather than indeterminate sentences during this period, these sentencing changes did not serve as the primary driver for rising incarceration rates. Instead, Zimring (2005) finds that incarceration rates rose sharply across all 50 states and the federal system regardless of whether these determinate sentencing regimes were imposed.

Convictions for drug crimes drove growth from 1986 to 1993, the second phase Zimring (2005) identifies, spurred by the two major federal reform packages proposed in 1986 and 1988 escalating the “war on drugs.” By establishing drug-related crime as a national law enforcement priority, increasing criminal penalties for drug-related crimes, and expanding law enforcement budgets, this legislation led to major increases in the arrest rates for drug-related crimes. It also spurred a host of “copycat” laws across the states and increased pressure on judges, prosecutors, and

other legal actors to increase arrest and conviction rates for drug-related crimes (Zimring, 2005). In California, the number of men imprisoned for drug-related convictions expanded from 1500 in 1980 to 22,600 in 1990, a rise from 7.4 to approximately 25 percent of the total population (Zimring & Hawkins, 1992). In 1992, there were more people imprisoned in California for drug offenses than *total* people imprisoned in 1980 (Zimring & Hawkins, 1992).

Unlike the first two decades of mass incarceration, in the period from 1994 to 2002, increased incarceration rates were spurred primarily by legislation requiring longer sentence lengths (Zimring, 2005). This phase of increasing rates, which built upon two full decades of sharp increases, was fostered by several forms of legislation, including mandatory minimum sentencing laws, state-level “truth in sentencing” legislation, and the proliferation of “three strikes and you’re out” laws. Passed in 1994, California’s Three Strikes law not only mandated a 25-to-life sentence for individuals convicted of a third serious or violent felony, but also enabled the prosecution of misdemeanor offenses as felonies if the convicted individual had two prior strikes. As a result, individuals who otherwise would have served six months to a year in a county jail for petty theft, for example, could be sentenced to 25-years-to-life (Zimring, 2005).

The mechanisms Zimring (2005) identifies represent front-end changes to the flow of individuals into the prison system; at the same time, adding to the increase in incarcerated rates along the dimension of depth, were a host of “back end” policies clogging the flow of incarcerated individuals out of prison. Though the percentage of incarcerated individuals serving indeterminate, life sentences was greatly reduced, these individuals continued to form approximately 20 percent of California’s incarcerated population in 2010, representing 32,000 individuals (Weisberg et. al., 2011). For the incarcerated individuals serving indefinite, life sentences, then, hope of earning release was greatly reduced.

As “tough on crime” rhetoric dominated political campaigns in the 1980s, 90s, and early 2000s, members of the parole board, who under current policy are appointed by the governor, found very few incarcerated individuals suitable for parole. Between 1980 and 2010, under 10 percent of parole hearings resulted in a finding of suitability, with a period from 1992 to 1999 below 2 percent (Weisberg et. al., 2011). In 1988, Proposition 89 granted California’s governor authority to reverse the parole board’s decisions in murder cases and to remand non-murder cases back to the parole board for further review. From 1991 to 1999, Governor Pete Wilson vetoed 27 percent of the parole board’s suitability findings (despite the fact that the parole board found individuals suitable in less than two percent of hearings over this period). From 1999 to 2003, Governor Gray Davis reversed nearly all findings of suitability, publicly touting his “no parole” policy and proclaiming he would not parole a single convicted murderer. Governor Schwarzenegger (2003-2011) reversed approximately 60 percent of grants, while remanding about 20 percent to the Board of Parole Hearings for further review (Weisberg et. al., 2011, p. 10-13).

Despite a slight increase in findings of suitability in recent years, two factors continue to impose longer back end sentences on those serving life sentences with the possibility of parole. One is the sheer backlog in the scheduling of parole hearings. Beginning in 2000, the relatively narrow gap between hearings scheduled and hearings conducted rapidly widened. In 2002, nearly 5000 hearings were scheduled while only slightly over 3000 were conducted. By 2009, over 7000 were scheduled and only approximately 3500 were actually conducted (Weisberg et. al., 2011).

Finally, and significantly, since the implementation of Marsy’s Law in 2009, the length of parole denials – or the time an individual waits before his or her next suitability hearing – has increased by dramatic proportions. Previous to Marsy’s Law, individuals denied parole could have their next hearing scheduled for anywhere between one and five years from the date of their denial. From 2000 to 2008, denials for one or two years occurred at approximately double the rate of denials for three to five years. In 2004, for example, there were approximately 1500 denials for one

or two years and less than 600 denials for three to five years. In 2009, the first year in which Marsy's Law was operative, there were over 500 denials for *seven to 15 years*, more than 2000 denials for three to five years, and less than 300 denials for one to two years (Weisberg et. al., 2011). Thus, individuals originally sentenced to 15-years-, 20-years, or 25-years-to-life could be required to wait an additional 15 years for their next suitability hearing after their first visit to the parole board.

Distinct from the era of systems expansion Messinger (1969) studied, then, was the lack of control prison officials maintained over the sentencing policies imposed during the neoliberal era. Legislation composed by state lawmakers, as well as ballot measures voted into law by the public compounded on the legal decisions of individual actors in law enforcement and the courts to increase the flow of individuals into the prison system and to increase the lengths of time they served. For the fifth of the prison population who continued to serve indeterminate sentences, the influence prison officials could wield to some extent in the previous era was eliminated by the firm grip provided to the governor both to appoint parole board members and to veto their decisions.

The reduction in indeterminate sentencing, then, and the ensuing sentencing shifts eliminated one key strategy of control prison officials utilized in the previous eras of penal history.

The sentencing shifts and rising incarceration rates characterizing neoliberal penalty were concentrated by class, race, and space (Wacquant, 2010), and thus significantly shifted the demographics of the prison population. Though people of color were disproportionately represented in the prison population prior to the rise of mass incarceration, the disproportionality of their representation deepened significantly with the onset of the "War on Drugs" and its targeting in communities of color. The percentage of California's total incarcerated population consisting of prisoners of color rose from approximately 50 percent in 1973 to 75 percent in 2010 (CDCR, 1973; CDCR, 2010). Within the population of prisoners of color, Latinos were the most highly represented in terms of raw numbers. At year end 2010, there were approximately 62,000 male prisoners classified as "Hispanic," comprising about 40 percent of the total male prison population; 44,000 male prisoners classified as "Black" (or 29 percent); and 9,000 classified as "Other" (6%) (CDCR, 2010). Though Latinos are the most highly represented in terms of raw numbers, incarceration rates are most disproportionately concentrated by far among African Americans: among adults in 2010, African Americans were incarcerated at a rate of 3,036 per 100,000, compared to 996 for American Indian/Alaska Natives, 757 for Hispanics, and 453 for whites (Prison Policy Initiative, 2016).

The practices of mass incarceration were concentrated not only by race, but also by age and geographic region. The portrait Elizabeth painted in the introduction of the "inmates changing" – the 17- and 18-years-olds from Los Angeles – accurately represents the broad statistical portrait of mass incarceration in California. Individuals under 25 formed the largest portion of new admissions to California prisons over the neoliberal period: 34.2% in 1985; 32% in 1991; and 28.4% in 2010 (CDCR, 2010). And during the 1980s, the proportion of criminal convictions leading to prison rather than an alternative sanction such as probation doubled outside of Los Angeles but more than tripled in Los Angeles (Zimring & Hawkins, 1992, p. 14). In 2010, Los Angeles County supplied the largest portion of the incarcerated population by far, at over 33 percent, with 53,918 incarcerated individuals arrested in the County (CDCR, 2010).

Conclusion: Dislocated Youth Disrupt the "Convict Code" and a New Era of Penalty Begins

The growth of the prisoner population occurred along the dimension of breadth – the increase in raw numbers of individuals arrested, convicted, and sentenced to state prison given shifting law enforcement and political priorities – and along the dimension of depth – meaning the length of sentences served. The impact of law enforcement and criminal justice practices over this period, and the attendant growth of California’s prison population, were disproportionately and acutely concentrated among young people of color, many of whom were from Los Angeles County and other counties in Southern California. While Latinos compose the highest percentage of those incarcerated, incarceration rates are most highly and disproportionately concentrated among African Americans and Native Americans.

For those managing the prison system, the collapse of the indeterminate sentencing regime underlying the “Correctional Institution” and the rehabilitative ideal ushered in a confusing and contradictory set of philosophies and practices stemming from the ideological void left in rehabilitation’s place (Garland, 2001). And the ever-increasing flow of new prisoners, many of whom were members of the “bastards” generation, presented thorny issues for prison officials and the older “convicts” who came of age in the prison system of an earlier era. The “peer orientation” the “bastards” developed in their lives on the streets, and the disintegrated and inverse authority structures in their communities characterized the “new inmates” Elizabeth described. These individuals, who gained independence at a young age and intimidated the adults around them through their brazenness, were uninterested and unprepared to adhere to the “convict code” – a system characterizing prison social relations until that point which allotted respect based on age and time in the system (Sykes, 1958; Irwin, 1980). Instead, the “bastards” brought with them the anger and dislocation they experienced in their lives on the streets and in the juvenile detention facilities through which they cycled.

The “bastards” also represented potential new recruits for prison gangs which were competing for resources and territories as the prison system expanded. And as the “convict code” and the “Correctional Institution” broke down, a notoriously violent period ensued (Irwin, 1980). As Elizabeth describes, in the face of this violence, prison officials abdicated responsibility for control to the prisoners themselves, abandoning efforts to protect the incarcerated and instead retreating in the hopes of protecting one another.

CHAPTER FIVE:

From Rehabilitation to Institutional Racialization

In the “Correctional Institution,” Messinger (1969) points to another “strategy of control” by which incoming prisoners were classified by professional treatment staff assessing individual biographies and psychological profiles. These treatment professionals then used this information to assign prisoners to the facilities which would best suit their treatment needs. As such, at least in principle, this classification system treated individual prisoners as unique and multi-faceted, and attempted to cater their conditions of confinement to their specific identities. The array of prisons composing the system in this era was defined in part by the types of treatment and opportunities for work and education available within that specific prison.

In the era of neoliberal penalty, however, *before* the bodies of California’s male prisoners are processed – strip-searched, fingerprinted, shaved, tested for illnesses, and subjected to other “mortifications” (Goffman, 1961) – they are assigned to a “racial”² and often an “affiliation” category which are then used to segregate and punish them along these divides (Goodman 2008). This process of *institutional racialization* now provides the most coherent and impactful “strategy of control” within California’s prison system.

Messinger (1969) recognized that throughout the history of the prison, a tempting but dangerous strategy for prison officials was to abdicate responsibility for management to the prison population itself:

Another alternative ... is to permit inmates to rule themselves, at least in the sense of permitting some inmates to control others so long as a semblance of quiet operations is maintained. But among other problems of such a strategy of indirect control, is the high risk, if not the certainty, that the warring factions the administrators seek to avoid will be formed in a struggle for possession over what there is to possess, including prestige (194).

While “a drift of power downward to inmates may be an inevitable tendency in prisons,” Messinger argues, “it is only a tendency and may be opposed” (1969, p. 195). In the void left by the abandonment of the rehabilitative project, with the increasing numbers of prisoners processed into the state system day after day, and with the rising tensions and violence that ensued, however, prison officials ceased opposing the “drift of power.” The imposition of institutional racialization now funnels incoming prisoners into a category with its own set of acceptable identities, ideologies, and norms that individuals must at least perform if not adopt. The individualized treatment plans used to classify prisoners in the “Correctional Institution” have been replaced by reductive group identities to which individuals are instead expected to conform.

The institutional racialization process is informal, and though it is unclear when it was adopted, men I interviewed who first entered the prison system in 1980 recalled experiencing it

² Following Goodman (2008), I put the term “race” (and its derivatives) as well as the designations used by the CDCR and interviewees to denote “racial” categories in quotes to indicate that the official categories used by the CDCR to segregate prisoners do not necessarily map on to skin color or ethnicity, the dominant determinants of one’s “race.” Otherwise, I use the term “racialization” refers to “the processes by which ideas about race are constructed, come to be regarded as meaningful, and are acted upon” (Murji & Solomos, 2005, p. 1). This concept builds on the contributions of “racial formation” theory, which holds the meaning of race and the content of racial identities as unstable and politically contested (Omi and Wynant, 2014).

when they entered the first prison mainline to which they were assigned. In 2006, when Sociologist Philip Goodman (2008) observed the classification process at two male prisons in California, he found the institutional racialization process to be fully entrenched, and to be implemented when incoming prisoners first disembarked from the buses transferring them from county jails.

Goodman (2008) observed how officers, constrained by the official administrative forms provided, negotiated with individual prisoners to determine the housing category, based first on the individual's "race" and second on his "affiliation." Across the two reception centers in which Goodman made observations, the categories made available to prisoners for both "race" and "affiliation" differed. At one facility, prisoners could select from the "racial" categories of "Black," "White," "Hispanic," and "Other," while at the other, the additional options of "Asian" and "American Indian" were available.

Once an individual's "race" was determined, a set of "affiliations" were triggered by the "racial" selection. For individuals selecting "Black" as their "race," for example, the options for affiliation included "Unaffiliated," "Crip," and "Blood." An individual's ultimate housing category could thus be "Unaffiliated Black," "Black Crip," or "Black Blood." For those who were placed in the "Hispanic" category, however, "Unaffiliated" was unavailable. Instead, individuals categorized as "Hispanic" were funneled into the "Northern Mexican," "Southern Mexican," "Bull Dog," or "Paisa" categories at one prison and between only "Northern Mexican" and "Southern Mexican" at the other. In contrast, individuals assigned to the "Other" category were automatically designated "Unaffiliated" (Goodman, 2008, p. 751).

As incoming prisoners destined for prison mainlines first disembarked from the prison bus, however, and before they were asked, "What are you?" – the question the officers generally used to begin the racialization process – an officers delivered a speech Goodman (2008) depicts as "well-rehearsed" to orient them to the social world they were about to enter. After first explaining a number of institutional rules and nuances, the officer then warned:

"Just some friendly advice, men. Whites, Brothers, Northerners, Southerners, Paisas, listen up. The Bulldogs are bombing on you. They don't care. Three on one, four on one, it doesn't matter to them. So keep your eyes open. You don't have any problems with the cops here. You got problems with the dogs. Now I'm not giving you a green light to go and retaliate, but go talk to your peoples and see what's up" (747).

Goffman (1961) identifies "house rules" as a key mechanism by which new individuals are processed into the total institution – a running down of the daily routines and expectations they will be expected to fulfill. In Goffman's (1961) account, it is staff who provide the house rules, but under the institutional racialization process, though staff offer an overview of basic rules, in the prisons Goodman observed they advise incoming prisoners to "go talk to your peoples," meaning to the other individuals, and ideally the "shot callers" (or leaders) of the group category to which they will be assigned to gain a better understanding of the political terrain and associated expectations on conduct governing their specific group in that prison at that moment.

And so it may be an individuals' first cellmate, or the leader of the group into which they have been categorized who is granted leeway by staff in the reception center housing units to move about freely in order to interact with new people and provide them with the basic rules governing their group. In some cases, the tables and showers may be shared with another group, or they may have made arrangements to switch off certain days. In some cases, the rules allow for cross-group sports teams to play one another, and in some cases not. And in some cases, the rules seem to simply offer a means by which to manage a large and divided population seeking equal access to limited resources, while in other cases they rest on an explicitly racist foundation.

When I asked Countryman, a lifer in an older generation than the “bastards” cohort, to describe the rules he encountered governing the “White” population within the various housing units, yards, and facilities, he explained:

You still had the same basic rule – stay with your race, don’t eat, drink, smoke after a black – that’s for the whites. The blacks don’t necessarily have that same mentality. They’d smoke after a white. If a white guy’s smoking a cigarette, you know, “Can I get shorts on that?” And you were allowed to give it to them, but you couldn’t do it yourself ... So those basic guidelines or codes or laws were the same throughout all the prisons. The yard rules were a little different. Some places you could play softball against the blacks, against the Hispanics, or baseball or whatever. In other places, the specific rules of that prison were that you couldn’t play any contact sports where you’re rubbing sweat on blacks.

The other primary “in-take” mechanism implemented by the various prisoner groups for processing new people onto a yard is a “paperwork policy,” a means by which the central file of incoming individuals is assessed to determine whether an individual’s crime of conviction and record in prison merits their participation in the group on the mainline, or whether they need to be “removed,” meaning attacked such that staff place them in Protective Custody. The paperwork policy is a potent means of securing conformity to group expectations and allegiance adapted to systems expansion. Until recent years, prisoner workers handled the central files for all incoming prisoners, both those transferred from a different prison or arriving for the first time in a reception center or mainline. The “inmate-clerks” working in these positions were expected to provide specific information on the new individuals entering the mainline derived from their central files. Though the specific rules and norms within the particular groups to which these individuals were assigned on a particular yard and in a particular housing unit may differ, the basic criteria for removal rests on whether an individual was convicted of a sex offense and whether there was evidence of them having debriefed or “snitched” (meaning provided information about other prisoners to legal officials). The paperwork policy acts as a particularly potent strategy of control in that it ensures that an individual’s conduct within one housing unit, yard, or prison will follow him regardless of where he is transferred.

The informal in-take process, composed of running down the house rules and the paperwork policy, function efficiently and provide the primary power structure individuals encounter when they enter contemporary prisons. Dante Maldonado, who entered the adult prison system in 2002, described the orderliness and sustained functioning of the racialized system he encountered in these terms:

It’s so strong in there. No matter where you go. It’s almost like a police department. If you lose your captain because of him or her retiring, or going to a different department, everyone knows how to do their job and function. They don’t need a head for the body. Like a teacher could call in sick, and they just call a sub up, and the kids already know what they gotta do. The kids know to come in, hang up their coats, sit at their desks, raise their hands, etc. It’s a finely ordered machine.

The divisions and leadership structures among racialized groups, as well as the ongoing tensions and rivalries periodically erupting among them, is colloquially termed “prison politics.” In explaining the kinds of tensions that can erupt in conflict, Dante shared his insight that within the prison, individuals and groups are vying not so much for dominance, but for equality:

There's fights breaking out, and a lot of it's about foolish things – things that are important to them, but not if you step out of the box ... But you have to remind yourself of where you're at. Everyone's fighting for rights and fighting for equality and fighting, not to be dominant, but to be treated equal. And there's always someone in there trying to take something – more than what they should – or trying to control something. And no one wants to give that up. So they're always fighting for that spot.

Prison politics are complex. For one, there are multiple ways of talking about the leadership structures and groups governing the prisoner population. Prison officials, and many prisoners as well, use the term “gangs” or “prison gangs.” Others describe the “political” community or “constitutional” community as opposed to the “non-political” or “unconstitutional” community. Another man I interviewed, who himself became actively involved in the “Northerner” leadership described the “organization-type philosophy of doing time,” as a means of contrasting the racialized groups characterizing the current era with the “convict code” of the “correctional institution” and previous eras of penal history, in which “doing ones own time” offered the dominant and valorized philosophy (Sykes, 2007).

The leadership structure within each group acts as a government, specifically a military dictatorship. When an individual works his way into the leadership structure, which he does by “putting in work” for the group, demonstrating his allegiance and work ethic, he joins a structure operating according to a military hierarchy with a written constitution and bylaws. The leadership on a particular yard or in a particular housing unit is responsible for brokering access to resources with the leadership of other groups, resolving conflict and imposing punishments within its own ranks, determining when to engage in warfare and when to establish treaties or ceasefires with other groups, among other tasks. When an individual enters the prison system, then, as the officer's warning to “go talk to your peoples” represents, they enter a dynamic political arena in which some factions may be at war while others are at peace; in which the leadership structure within their group may be more or less corrupt; and in which there may be individuals within the group who are planning to overthrow the existing government to establish their own structure.

When incoming prisoners are racialized, then, they are funneled into reductive categories imposing a militarized group identity. They are forced to choose one, and only one category, regardless of the complicated and layered identities they may have organically developed in the lives pre-incarceration. At the same time, the loyalties, identities, and relationships they developed organically in their lives before prison are not often simply or quickly replaced; rather, they are layered upon by the divisions they encounter within the new world in which they find themselves.

When Richard entered Chino's reception center in 1989, for example, he was immediately presented with a series of jarring interactions that tugged at different aspects of the layered identities and loyalties he had developed over the course of life in Samoa, Hawaii, and Wilmington. His organically developed, multi-faceted identity conflicted with the one, and only one, racialized category he was required to choose when he first got off the bus. Despite his Samoan ancestry, in Chino's R&R, Richard negotiated a categorization as “Black” due to his allegiance to the subset of the Piru Bloods street gang, which, in California prisons, through association with the Bloods, is considered a “Black” gang despite individuals of diverse backgrounds affiliating on the street. As he walked to his cell in the reception center for the first time, the porter³ realized Richard had been

³ A prisoner who works as a janitor in the housing unit, and, because of this freedom of movement, plays an especially important role as a liaison among prisoners and between prisoners and staff.

assigned to a cell in which a man categorized as “Southern Mexican” was already housed, a placement which could have led to violent confrontation.

Richard recognized the porter as a member of the Crips and a personal rival, and was therefore unsure how to react when he approached. In this moment, Richard learned that “racial” affiliation trumps street gang affiliation in prison. The porter informed him, “We have bigger enemies in here” due to “Blacks” being under “constant threat by the Southern Mexicans.” Crips and Bloods were therefore temporarily united as “Blacks.” Richard explained: “In juvie and on the street, everything is about gangs and colors. In prison, it’s still about colors, but it’s about *skin* color.” Thus, Richard discovered that his loyalty to his gang, which spurred his decision to identify as “Black,” was now layered upon by another set of allegiances – the need for “Blacks” as a category, regardless of their affiliation, to protect one another.

Richard’s experience illuminates another layer of complexity of prison politics, the fact that the governance structures within each racialized group maintain different degrees of influence over the racialized group as a whole. For those categorized as “Northern” or “Southern Hispanic,” as reflected in the forms the officers used to sort incoming prisoners in the sites Goodman (2008) observed, there is generally one primary government that controls the entire group and is known to do so firmly. For those categorized as “Black,” however, there is no one centralized government. Instead, there are numerous options for affiliation, generally associated with “Crips” or the “Bloods,” and there are options to remain “Unaffiliated,” to identify as a Muslim, a Christian, or simply to “do ones own time.” The various structures within the broader “Black” population may be at war with one another at various points in time, but will unite as “Black” if the “Blacks” come under attack by another racialized category, as was the case in Chino when Richard first entered the system.

After the porter straightened things out with the officers posted in the unit, Richard was assigned to a different cell which he shared with another prisoner categorized as “Black.” When he first went to the cafeteria, however, and sat with a group of “Blacks,” he was approached by a younger man of Samoan descent, who gruffly informed Richard that he should not be eating at that table given his Samoan heritage. Richard, who was sensitive to the fact that the younger man’s gruff approach was masking his nervousness, chuckled while recollecting that he had felt “offended” by this young man’s treatment given the fellowship and code of conduct existing among Samoans that Richard felt should trump the other affiliations and categories into which individuals were funneled.

A few days later, Richard was approached by an older prisoner of Samoan descent, who advised him to identify as “Other” instead of “Black.” By doing so, he argued, Richard could place himself in neutral territory, rather than in the midst of the ongoing, violent struggle between “Blacks” and “Southern Mexicans.” Richard reflected, “But I wasn’t ready to hear that at that point. I had been ready to kill and die for this gang. I had friends who had died for the gang. And it would have meant all that was meaningless.” As an “Other,” Richard would be free to remain neutral in the ensuing struggles dominating political life among prisoners in Chino at that time, but by remaining loyal to his street gang, and by proxy, the “Blacks,” he placed himself in the midst of combat.

Richard’s loyalty to the Bloods, in particular, had deepened in his numerous spells in juvenile camps previous to his conviction. As each sentence he served as a juvenile disconnected him from the “surrogate family” his gang had provided, he became more aware of the benefits of a proxy loyalty to the Bloods. He was therefore primed to maintain this loyalty, both out of a sense of meaning and as a strategy for survival, when he entered the prison system at 18. This loyalty counteracted the advice he received from the older Samoan prisoner and trumped the identifications he continued to feel with his Samoan heritage; gang involvement on the streets and its entrenchment

within juvenile facilities thus translated into a relatively smooth transition into gang involvement inside prison, despite Richard's complex personal identifications.

For Sparky, the California Youth Authority (CYA) prisons he served time in throughout his adolescence maintained strict divisions that in some ways prepared him for racialization he would encounter in the adult system. The differences between the street gang loyalties individuals maintain in juvenile camps and CYA, and the "racial" loyalties that trump them in adult prison, however, translated into Sparky undergoing a massive shift in identification as he transferred from CYA to the adult system.

Sparky entered CYA allied with the members of the gang he had affiliated with on the street; at a crucial juncture, however – a moment Sparky referenced a second time when I asked him to tell me about his worst day in prison – he was "set loose" by the members of this gang. After seeing his tag crossed out on a wall in one of the small rooms he was locked up in within CYA's Intractable Ward Program (IWP), Sparky fought another member of his gang, which was associated with the "Southern Hispanic" population in prison, and sent a message to the leadership regarding the other youth's lack of loyalty. The response he received confirmed that because the other youth was Mexican American, and Sparky was white, Sparky would be "dropped" because they "have to stick with the Mexicans" in the adult prison system.

Though Sparky's gang was composed of individuals from various racial and ethnic backgrounds on the streets, these relationships may be ruptured in preparation for entering the adult prison system given the anticipation of the rules and divisions that individuals will encounter in their various groups. For the members of Sparky's street gang, which was associated with the "Southern Mexican" population in prison, Sparky's whiteness was acceptable on the streets and in CYA, but they could not prioritize personal loyalty to him as an individual given the divisions they anticipated would be enforced when they arrived in the adult system. Gabriel provided an insight adding another layer of complexity to prison politics, which helps explain the youth's decision to "drop" Sparky in this moment.

Within the "Black" population, politics operate from the outside in, meaning that the locus of control for the political community rests in the leadership structures in street organizations outside of prison. The prison system and the individual yards and housing units within each facility thus largely serve as a kind of satellite in which territorial skirmishes and shifting alliances and rivalries from the streets continue to be negotiated. For the Northerners and Southerners, however, the locus of power rests within the leadership structure inside the prisons, and the associated gangs on the streets, though they maintain a certain level of autonomy and discretion in their daily operations and rivalries, ultimately follow the lead of the structures operating inside the system.

In CYA, paranoia over upholding the racial divisions the confined youth anticipated encountering when they transferred to the adult prison system ran rampant, and the rules entrenching these divisions were even more rigidly enforced than they were in adult prisons. Sparky explained:

YA trumps prison. The politics are so stringent that they have this thing called the "leva." So if you get punked or even have just a soft personality or if you eat after somebody who's not in your race, you go on the leva for the Mexicans. You're on the "shine" for the Whites, and the Whites and the Southern Mexicans is always hooked up in YA. So once you go on the leva, you're there for life. Let's say you're 14 and you're not getting out until you're 25, which is very common. For that whole 11 years, 10 years, you will be considered a leva. Nobody can talk to you, play cards with you, have fun with you, eat after you, buy your stuff. There's no interaction ... You're free game, fair game ... So if you get dropped, that means you've been attacked first. So that attack is the marker. The day you got dropped, you were

attacked, so everybody knows, “Okay, they battery-packed him,” which is batteries in a shoe, in a sock, or a lock on a belt.

The level of vulnerability – in this case encompassing not only the physical threat of assault and exploitation that comes from being “fair game,” but also the social vulnerability of total ostracism and isolation – reached a fever pitch in CYA. Sparky described how numerous items would be swept off the floor at the end of the day, all of them – by virtue of landing on the floor where a prisoner of a different race might have stepped or left some residue – considered on the “leva.” A dropped toothbrush, bar of soap, or article of clothing, despite the high value placed on the tiniest of items in these conditions of extreme material deprivation, became untouchable.

In his sense of absolute isolation after being dropped from his gang, Sparky decided he was no longer able to tolerate his conditions of confinement and spoke up to staff: “After about four years – I’d been in solitary confinement single-celled for so long that I was fed up, and I told the parole board that they needed to remand me to the adult authorities; otherwise, I would hurt – start harming people. They told me, ‘Go ahead.’ So I did. I started harming people – stabbed another inmate, went from CYA to prison for that.”

It was in this moment, and his ensuing transition from CYA to the adult system, that Sparky recalls he “realized he was white.” On the adult prison mainline to which he was first transferred, Sparky was embraced by the “White” population, and in turn embraced this new identity:

I was talking to the – you know the white shot caller, and he was like, “Yeah, dude, you’re white, motherfucker. Come with us. You’re awesome. You’re obviously – you have heart and you’re a soldier.” And so I jumped into that both feet. It was even better because it made more sense to me. It made more sense for me to be allied with somebody that I had logical ties to and like ancient, cultural ties to than it did these people who at the first sign of trouble turned their back on me is how I saw it. And really, it was just – it had nothing to do with any of that. It was this system that was – none of us set it up, but we’re all trying to find a way to deal with it.

Sparky thus found a new community and sense of belonging in his transfer to the adult system, and he embraced it with gusto. His commentary illustrates the ruptures to organically developed ties that occur as individuals are funneled into categories through the institutional racialization process and the ways in which these artificial and reductive categories take on meaning. Sparky experienced his transfer from the juvenile to adult system as a form of rupture and rebirth.

Sparky and Richard’s testimonies also demonstrate the ways in which institutional racialization and the leadership structures it strengthened influence the organization of the confined populations in which the adult prison system interact. In the “correctional institution” era, Messinger (1969) describes the ways that California’s prison system, as a whole, interacted with the other criminal justice and mental health systems, such as the juvenile facilities which transferred individuals back and forth from the adult system. . In particular, Messinger focused on the creation of the California Youth Authority and its relationship to DVI-Tracy, the prison within the adult system in which he conducted the most in-depth research. By isolating those young adults deemed “intractable” within DVI, and providing a segregated system of “honor” and “non-honor” housing units, prison officials attempted to manage the thorniest population by incentivizing good conduct and limiting their impact within the other prisons and youth facilities.

Through abdication of control to the prisoners’ governance structures, prison officials in the neoliberal era also enabled the trickle-out of the divisions and reductive identities associated with prison politics into the adjacent systems. While Richard was primed to maintain loyalty to the Bloods given his experiences of dislocation in the juvenile system, Sparky was dropped from his

gang and primed to embrace a “White” identity within CYA. Henry was presented with the choice regarding his affiliation while he was incarcerated in the county jail by the cousins and friends he encountered in ample supply when he was first confined:

A lot of my cousins are there, a lot of people who I ran around with on the street are there, and it looks like I’m ‘a get life, but you never know. So they’re like – my cousins came – and they’re like, “You need to make a choice. What are you gonna do? You can’t do both. You can’t run with the Southsiders and be an Indian. So you have to make up your mind.” There was a couple of them that wouldn’t even talk to me ... so, finally, they’re like, “Today’s the day. You’re gonna make a choice. What are you going to do? Are you with them or are you gonna stay with us?”

Henry’s street gang was an offshoot of one which originated in Los Angeles and was associated with the “Southern Mexican” population in prisons. Because the process of institutional racialization prohibits individuals from maintaining the complex identities they maintain on the streets, Henry’s cousins warn him that he cannot be both Indian and a Southerner as he has been on the streets. Instead, he had to choose – either he could affiliate as a “Southern Mexican” in order to maintain loyalty to his street gang, or he could choose to affiliate as an American Indian. Henry recalls them telling him:

“You need to make up your mind now, ‘cause once you get [to prison], it’s locked in. You can’t switch up once you get there.” And I’m like, “Well that’s easy.” And they’re like, “What?” And I’m like, “That’s easy. I was born Indian.” And it was like, “That what’s I’m talking ‘bout, cousin!” You know, they went crazy.

When Henry arrived in the adult system, he made sure to cover his bases with the Southerners and the Northerners, who maintain a historical rivalry, proactively explaining his decision to ally with the American Indians as a means of avoiding any potential trouble if one of his cousins or friends from the streets were to let it slip that he had been once been affiliated with a “Southern” gang:

Everytime I got to prison – anywhere I got, I always went to the Southsiders and let them know, “Hey, this is what I did, and this is – I’m not Mexican, I don’t know anybody from LA, it was up here, but I’m a Native American and that’s who I roll with. Just so you know ... And it doesn’t matter to them, as long as you didn’t come in claiming it in prison. So I learned that. And so when I hung out with the Northerners too, I’m like, “Hey, just so you know. I used to do this, I used to be a Southsider up there, but you know” – and they’re like, “But you’re an Indian right?” “Yeah.” “Who do you roll with?” “The Indians! I’m just letting you know, just in case somebody says anything.” So he’s like, “Yeah whatever.” So they never really tripped.

The influence of prison politics, once entrenched, trickled out from the prison into the connected criminal justice agencies, requiring individuals to negotiate decisions regarding their affiliations before even entering the adult system. Regardless of their ultimate categorization, once funneled into a particular racialized group individuals may be able to lay low, maintaining a semblance of autonomy within the group, or they may be pressured to “put in work” as a soldier for the leadership structure, or they may make the decision to actively pursue a political career.

Though resisting the system is possible to some degree, it requires an extreme sense of independence and the commitment to swimming upstream given both the official, institutional processes funneling individuals into the proscribed categories and the rigidity with which conformity

can be enforced within particular groups. In describing his decision to identify as “Other” rather than as a “Northerner,” Raymond described the valuable advice he received from an older, more seasoned prisoner, which provided him with the insight and the encouragement to operate independently even as he was simultaneously being recruited into serving as a “soldier” for the Northerners. In the San Mateo County Jail, Raymond was incarcerated on “million dollar row,” the solitary confinement unit housing for individuals deemed to pose high flight risks. His immediate neighbor held a position of leadership within the Nuestra Familia organization, which governs the “Northern Hispanic” population (though other groups have attempted and succeeded in dislodging them in particular contexts). He recalled this man’s attempts to coerce him into adopting a loyalty to the organization by tapping into his fears:

This guy thought he had me believing that he was my friend ... They try to act like, like, they care about you, by schooling you and everything, but then also comes the thing of “Oh, can I get some coffee?” But if you’re not careful – like with this guy – he got to the point where he wanted to borrow money from me. I didn’t give him any, even though I could have, because I knew he was thinking of me like a chump – he was making me into a mark.

...There’s also the thing of, “Oh you grew up here in the North. ‘Cause you know when you get to prison, they’re going to want to know where you’re from, and because you grew up on this side, you’re going to have to tell them that you’re a Northerner. Because the Southerners, they’re not going to understand – *we* understand, we know what you’re about, that you never got in a gang. But the Southerners aren’t going to understand all that, they’re just going to see that you’re from up here – so you’re going to have to choose a side.” So I can’t even see this man’s face, I can only hear his voice. But the manipulation starts because it’s all about fear ... If you allow them to tap into your fears, they got you.

Through a random twist of fate, Raymond encountered another prison veteran in a holding cell who provides him with a contrasting perspective for how to survive his incarceration while maintaining his independence. While he sat in a cage awaiting a ride to court, an officer placed this man, also a member of the Northerner organization, in the same cage. It turned out the older man had listened to Raymond’s conversations through the walls of million-dollar row, and had developed a certain respect for how he carried himself:

He complemented me on how I interacted with people. I asked him a few things about his organization as well. But he began to explain about cowards hiding behind cowards – those were his words. He said, “This so-called Carnalismo” – like, brotherhood – “is cowards hiding behind cowards” ... He told me stories about the guy next door to me, how he was a coward ... And he told me, “If I could do it over again, I would do it solo. I would do it alone. And I wouldn’t join anybody.” And I really, really did take that in. Because I knew it was the truth.

As he prepared to enter the adult system, and took seriously the advice of this man to “do it solo,” Raymond negotiated a categorization as “Other” given his Guatemalan heritage. He also developed a strategy for how he would deal with pressure he might encounter to “put in work” for the Northerners, demonstrating the extreme measures an individual must be prepared to take if he is interested in preserving some level of independence and autonomy:

Before I even got to prison, I decided if someone approached me and asked me to do something, I would say, “Okay, let me get my weapon.” And then when I got the weapon, I would stab him in the neck. And I would just see how that would go. But that was my

goal, to stab the first mother flower to give me an order, kind of thing. The way I saw it was, I was never getting out of prison ... Even though I didn't have a life sentence, I had 19 years on 85 percent time – to me that seemed like a lifetime. I saw that as I'm already dead anyway. So I want to die with honor.

For Gabriel, the broader array of affiliation possibilities within the “Black” population translated in him being able to take advantage of the relationships between the “political” and “non-political” communities. In describing the politics among the “Blacks” he first encountered during his incarceration in the reception center, Gabriel explained:

What I thought was really interesting about that, was that you're black first. That means that if you see two white boys jumping on a black person, you better go help that black person. Somehow you'll be dealt with about that. You're black first. I don't care if you're a Muslim, scholar, a Christian. As a black person you better help that black person. Then it breaks down to your political affiliation ... My whole joke was I was non-political – but all of the people who are political are my folks, though. So I was kind of fortunate in a way – and there were a group of us – because we got to reap all the benefits of the politicized community, but didn't have to deal with all of the negatives. Like you're not going to chastise me as a Sergeant of Arms because I failed to do a book report – but at the same time, if something jumps off on the yard, they'll jump in. I'm never going to ask for help, because that's a weak person. But because of that, if something happens, they might have my back. They'll say, “What's going on,” and I'll say, “It's my business,” and they'll say, “No, it's *our* business. It's the community's business.” Because if you get involved in something it can cause ripples and waves, and it can impact everyone.

Like Richard, Gabriel quickly discovered that regardless of how one identified within the relatively broad range of options available to prisoners categorized as “Black,” a loyalty to the “Black” population as a whole was expected and enforced. But within the “Black” political arena, Gabriel was able to operate independently while taking advantage of the leadership structure's ability to resolve conflict and offer him protection.

Tomás found no such solace within the Northern population into which he was assigned. Because Tomás is Mexican American and was born north of Bakersfield, he was automatically considered a “Northern Hispanic,” a category for which there are no official options provided for maintaining an “Unaffiliated” status. When he was first processed through the San Quentin reception center, he was immediately funneled into this category – the same designation into which so many of the adult men in his neighborhood in Stockton had also at one time or another been funneled. In recalling his classification, Tomás stated:

You get off the bus ... and they stand there with a clipboard. “Norteno or Sureno?” Those are the options they give you ... And you come from the county jail together – and it's already segregated for you. So they put you with the Northerners. You're celled up with Northerners, you go to the Northern yard, and so you're already set up to be a Northerner. They got it all laid out for you.

Tomás' instincts to resist his categorization were strong, and he fought this process legally, concerned that his automatic assignment to the “Northern Hispanic” category could be used as evidence of gang affiliation by prison officials. He recalled:

I fought that whole affiliation process, and I was just a kid. I fought that all the way – you can't just frickin' affiliate me as a gang member. Ten years later, they wrote me that the

CDCR has to identify prisoners in certain ways for their safety. This doesn't mean that you're a gang member, but that other prisoners may see you that way. So I always kept that paper with me. And I always, even when we were on lockdown, every time they would say something, like "What are you?" I always said, "I'm a human being. What are you?" So I always fought that, even though I was a Northerner. I mean, you don't have a choice.

Unlike the older men in his neighborhood, many of whom affiliated with the Nuestra Familia prison gang, and unlike many of the other young people from his neighborhood who looked up to the "big homies" and were interested in making a name for themselves in the organization, Tomás was uninterested in politics and found little solace in the community of Northerners with whom he was categorized. He describes the predicament he faced as an individual funneled into the Northerner category, and the extreme strategy necessary to develop as a means of protecting the little autonomy that one may maintain within the group:

Within the Northerners there's actually gang members, and then there's regular old Northerners who got stuck. Most of us are just stuck in this thing ... The guys who didn't clique up, most of them are actually a little more assertive. So there's this weird relationship. Because the guys you think are the scar[ed] guys, because they don't want to be in the gang, are actually not – it's the opposite. But you still gotta listen to [the gang members] – the [gang members] still wield power. But they don't wield enough power to scare these regular guys into doing stuff, because we're already like, "We're not joining your freaking gang"... They can tell us what to do to a certain extent, but they can't get me to stab somebody. Because I would just say, "No." And then, they would have to do something to me ... It's a gamble ... I'm not actively, like – they call it going against grain, or preaching against cause. [I'm] just staying out the way ... You gotta go outside – there's certain rules, and for the most part you play the part ... But as soon as I feel like I can't win either way – like if you're telling me I gotta stab someone or you'll stab me – either way [I'm] screwed. So you might as well come stab me.

Rather than his unaffiliated position enabling him to reap the benefits of the political community, as Gabriel's did, Tomás experienced his position as a constant gamble. He went along with the expectations on all those categorized as "Northern Hispanic" to go to the yard every day, to exercise to maintain his strength, and to refrain from "preaching against cause," which largely allowed him to fit in harmoniously with the group. But at the same time, if he were to face pressure to harm an enemy or punish a misbehaving member of the Northern population, he would take the gamble involved in refusing. Though this could mean losing favor or creating enemies within the group, the leadership also needed "regular guys" like him in order to provide cover, to ensure that prison staff and gang investigators are less able to identify those holding positions of leadership.

In Tomás' estimation, the odds were tipped in his favor. By establishing himself as someone not easily coerced, the likelihood that others will approach him to "put in work" in the future diminished. If he were to say "yes," not only would he risk punishment by prison officials, he would also have designated himself as someone who would say "yes" in the face of pressure, and another request would be sure to come down the line.

Conclusion: Enforced Affiliations & Conformity

As violence erupted within the prison system in the early 1980s just as the rehabilitative ideal was abandoned, prison officials retreated into a mode of survival, ceding management of the

prisoner population to prisoner organizations by entrenching the divisions they claimed. The power and governance structures this process entrenched bled out from the adult prison system into adjacent juvenile systems and jails serving as feeders into the adult system. The juvenile detention facilities and county jails serve as priming grounds in which individuals who anticipate entry into the adult system begin performing and enacting the power structure they anticipate encountering to ensure their security and good standing when they are eventually transferred.

Unlike the classification systems operating in the “correctional institution” era, in which individual identity and history served as a primary source of information in assigning an individual to a mainline, in the neoliberal era, individual relationships and identities are sublimated as incoming prisoners are funneled into racialized group categories imposing conformity to relationships and ideologies that may feel artificial and foreign.

As the “bastards” entered the adult prison system, they thus navigated a complicated political terrain. They faced long sentences, in many cases, sentences longer than they had been alive at the moment of their imposition. And they were no longer provided with clear incentives for participating in whatever educational, vocational, and therapeutic options may have been available within the high security contexts into which they were first assigned. While some individuals, despite these conditions, continued to resist the conformity imposed by their racialization and the allure of involvement in prison politics, for others, political involvement represented a clear and organized means by which to gain prestige and find meaning within the prison world. The military hierarchy within each governance structure, leading up the “big homies” in units designated for punishing “active” gang members and “shot callers,” provided a clear path and a sense of purpose for young people whose experiences of incarceration in the neoliberal entrenched the sense of dislocation they already struggled with on the streets, and that formed a key element in their path towards incarceration in the first place.

CHAPTER SIX: *From Reward to Punishment*

In the period of systems expansion Messinger (1969) studied, a primary strategy of control for managing the increasing prisoner population was facility expansion. Between 1944 and 1955, the system expanded from three to seven male facilities and from a total population of 5,000 to 15,000 prisoners (p. 11). In the next phase of penal history, however, from 1955 to 1969, Messinger points to several strategies of control prison officials utilized to incentivize good behavior and participation in rehabilitative programs as a means of reducing the length of prison sentences and reducing the population on the “back end.”

These strategies, underpinned by the rehabilitative ideal, included multiple mechanisms for awarding “credits” for good behavior in the form of time off of prison sentences, which included a “two for three” credit for those participating in prison work crews, in which they earned two days off their sentences for every three days of work; automatic time off for every month of a sentence that an individual served; and the creation of flexible credits which prison wardens could administer at their discretion for “extra meritorious conduct and industry” (1969, p. 56). As such, these rewards functioned not only to incentivize peaceful conduct, but provided a release valve for the increasing population.

Another primary strategy incentivizing good behavior and thus tamping down on the potential for violence and conflict in overcrowded conditions included the segregation of prisoners into housing units operating under an “honor system.” According to Messinger, prison officials found the honor system to be “essential to the security of the institution” (p. 197). Though incoming prisoners were generally placed on a mainline, considered a “non-honor” unit, they could earn their way into the “honor” units through accruing seniority in “clean time,” a period of disciplinary-free reports maintained by prison staff. When beds became available in the honor units, the prisoners at the top of the list were transferred.

Within the honor units, prisoners enjoyed a far higher level of freedom of movement and autonomy. They were provided keys to their own cells, for example, rather than only being able to leave and return when officials unlocked and locked each tier at intervals throughout the day. In honor units, prisoners could visit with one another at the doors of cells, take showers, use the TV and the game room at their discretion. In the non-honor units they were kept in their cells; use of showers and the TV room were only permitted according to prescribed schedules, and they were searched before they entered the TV room (Messinger, 1969, p. 198-9). At DVI-Tracy in the 1950s and 60s, 40 percent of prisoner beds were contained within honor units (p. 198).

In the neoliberal era, the strategies of control Messinger noted as providing a release valve for the growing population and mitigating conflict were replaced by systems expansion as the exclusive means of accommodating the dramatically increasing prison population. With the sentencing shifts discussed in Chapter Four, the incentives for good behavior were largely eliminated, reducing the discretion of prison officials to release overflow population.

Instead, the system of rewards Messinger (1969) describes was replaced by a system of negative sanctions, including the use of force among correctional officers with militarized weaponry; lockdowns, in which all members of particular racialized groups, and sometimes the incarcerated population of the prison as a whole, were prohibited from leaving their cells for weeks and months at a time; and the creation of highly restrictive units designated for “the worst of the worst,” primarily used to confine individuals suspected of gang association or violence.

These negative sanctions functioned to further isolate and dislocate incoming prisoners, who faced extremely long sentences within an overcrowded, tense, and racialized order. Lacking incentives for good conduct and participation in the scant rehabilitative programs that may have

existed on the high security prisons to which they were first assigned, the “bastards” generation faced prison yards characterized by hopelessness and despair. The destruction of positive incentives and opportunities to connect to a meaningful path led some individuals to embrace their circumstances, becoming “torpedoes” in prison parlance, or those who found a compensatory form of meaning and motivation by doing all they could to reach the most notorious and brutal carceral contexts within the system.

In the era of neoliberal penalty, given the dramatically increasing prison population and the reduction in back end mechanisms for reducing it, facility expansion and the use of force were primary “strategies of control” implemented by the Department of Corrections for dealing with overcrowding and its ensuing tensions. Between 1980 and 1996, the State of California constructed and opened 24 new prisons in rural towns up and down the state, filling in the “prison alley” extending from the town of Susanville in the Northern California forests to Tehachapi in the Southern California desert (Gilmore, 2007). Despite this expansion, which more than tripled the total number of state prisons, these facilities continued to operate at over 200 percent capacity (Gilmore, 2007).

The prisons composing this vastly expanded system were rated according to their security level. The mainlines to which incoming prisoners are assigned under neoliberal penalty are designated not by types of treatment available, but rather by four basic custody designations: level 4 and 4+ (super-maximum), level 3 (maximum), level 2 (medium), and level 1 (minimum security). Incoming prisoners are assigned a certain level of points corresponding to the tiered security levels, determining to which mainlines they may be assigned during classification procedures that occur while they are confined in reception centers. The factors weighted most heavily in determining an individual’s points are the length of their prison term in years, their age at first arrest, and their age upon entry to the prison reception center (Tahamont, 2013). For the “bastards,” then, assignment to a level 4 or 4+ mainline was almost inevitable given their young age at first arrest and confinement and the long sentences imposed. Rather than addressing an individual’s personal history and mental health profile, neoliberal classification procedures are exclusively based on static factors intended to predict the risk an individual poses to institutional safety and security.

The opening of newly constructed prisons represented particularly violent and volatile moments in the experience of confinement, one in which territories and resources had not yet been carved out and the leadership among staff and prisoners was not yet stabilized. One strategy of control implemented by prison officials and lobbied for by the correctional officers union was the weaponization of officers posted on the ground within the prisons. In the 1990s, California was one of only three states to allow firearms in the cellblocks and exercise yards, and California was the only state that permitted officers to use lethal force to break up fistfights between prisoners (Page, 2011). Between 1989 and 1994, officers in California reportedly killed 24 inmates and wounded 175 statewide, many of these shootings during fistfights and other altercations in which no inmates wielded weapons. During this period, shooting deaths in California prisons tallied more than all other prison systems in the country combined (Arax & Gladstone, 1998). Between 1989 and 1994, Corcoran prison earned an especially notorious reputation, and was subject to an FBI probe after 27 prisoners were reportedly shot dead by officers and an additional 148 were wounded by gunfire, making it the deadliest prison in the US (Page, 2011, p. 263).

As these reports illustrate, the use of force was one direct strategy offering negative sanctions and contributing to high levels of lethal violence within maximum-security facilities. And exposure to these high levels of violence served to further dislocate the individuals entering high

security environments, who were forced to dissociate from their emotions as a means of coping with traumatic exposure.

When Benjamin was transferred from the San Quentin Reception Center to a level 4 mainline at Calipatria in 1993, a year after it opened in the southeastern desert of California, he was unprepared for the chaos and violence he would encounter. In 1992, locked up in the county jail without access to the phone and not knowing whether another young man he shot in the midst of a group fight had lived, Benjamin had a seizure. “That can happen because of the pressure,” he remarked. “I probably wasn’t eating. So that was a rough time.” By contrast, his experience in the reception center, largely due to the fact that he had received a sentence and “had something to work toward,” was relatively stable. Benjamin’s tone shifted, however, as he described his transition to Calipatria’s mainline:

Mainline for me was *insane*. That’s a whole different level of the game – a whole learning experience that I never could have prepared – no one can prepare for that. Level 4 is intense. Politics, all that stuff, I had to learn a whole *bunch* of shit right away.

The initial few years of Benjamin’s incarceration on a level 4 yard at Calipatria involved severe and ongoing dislocation given the racialized violence he encountered among the prisoner population and the violence from officers. In his early childhood, Benjamin’s nuclear family moved from Oakland to a suburban town in an outer region of the San Francisco Bay Area called the Tri-Valley. As a black youth growing up in a predominantly white area, Benjamin and the other local youth of color banded together to protect themselves from humiliating attack. The racialized ideologies and alliances he encountered in prison were thus shocking and incomprehensible, as was the rigidity with which they were enforced in the high tension maximum-security context where he was first confined:

It was so vicious– I mean the racism ... to go inside and see Latin dudes with Skinheads? So one time, within a month of being in the place, there was one – he must have been a Southern Mexican talking to a black dude about some tattoo art. And they cut the dudes throat just for talking to a brother! It was *that* racist – I was like, “Damn, hatred against blacks is that thick here.” That he would ally against *me* with an *Aryan*? I had to relearn a lot of shit. I’ve never experienced racism like that ... I heard the language like, “Don’t sweat with the toads,” and all that shit. If you smoke a cigarette behind someone, [the whites]’re gonna kill you. And the Mexican Mafia [the prison organization associated with the “Southern Hispanic” category] feel the same way! And they come together with that same agreement – like [blacks]’re the worst of the worst.

Benjamin was also unfamiliar with the complex rivalries and divisions related to gang politics within the black prison population given his upbringing in the Bay Area where the influence of gangs like the Bloods and the Crips was far less entrenched than in Los Angeles:

You don’t know about these rankings, and the differences – there’s rules for everything ... so I’m stepping into a yard of 1000 people, everybody on the damn yard got two or three life sentences, they don’t got shit to lose – number one. And they got five of us from the Bay Area coming down. Every Crip, Blood, whatever – I don’t know anything about that culture! ... You think that there’s Bloods and Crips – there’s so much dissension within those groups! ... Bloods from Long Beach and Compton, they’re trying to kill each other too! So they might be at war, or they might be at peace. You never really know ... But the politics – that level 4 is a different world, there’s just always some shit.

This period of violence and tension, and high powered staff response, resulted in Benjamin witnessing one of the prisoner fatalities represented in the statistical portrait painted above:

And then they killed this guy for fighting with his cellie. That was intimidating too. They shot him in the head. And they *knew* there was no weapons! And they wracked the gate – but because he didn’t get down fast enough – they just shot in the cell in the building. It was like, damn. And that’s when – it’s like you have to start questioning yourself about humanity. [who shot him – an officer or a prisoner?]

Growing tension between prisoners and officers at times overshadowed the hostilities among different prisoner groups as well. Benjamin described how Calipatria’s administration changed its policy regarding how prisoners were expected to respond to the alarms signaling violent incidents. Staff sound alarms in the case of fights, riots, and other incidents requiring additional officers to respond; during alarms, which sound throughout the whole facility regardless of where the incident in question took place, prisoners are generally required to stay in place and squat or sit on the ground to demonstrate they are uninvolved in the incident, to provide clear paths of sight to the gunners in the watch towers, and to remain out of the way of those staff responding on the ground.

The policy change implemented at Calipatria required prisoners to lay prone on the ground in the case of an alarm, which, in the climate of the Southern California desert, amounted to torture:

And Calipatria was hella hot. Like beyond hot. It would get up to 120 degrees. And they came up with this new rule that they didn’t just want us to get down, but prone out, flat on our stomachs. People were getting burned up on that cement down there. I was like, “Fuck that, I’m not doing that shit.” But then they started shooting at you! It was ridiculous ... Like, obviously, I’ll sit down over here on my ass, but damn, that shit is hot, I’m not going to *lay* on it.

Similar to Benjamin’s experience, Henry depicted his experience on a level 4 yard at Corcoran in 1993 as a crash course in acute personal vulnerability. On his first day in line to get into the cellblock, another prisoner slit the throat of a man standing in line in front of him. “And dude was a warrior!” Henry exclaimed. “He pulled the two pieces together and walked four flights up to his cell!”

In the middle of that night, officers informed of the attack searched the cells. They banged on the cell bars with flashlights and ordered Henry and his cellmate to lie on the ground with their hands on their heads while they “tossed” the cell, tearing off bed sheets, and throwing mattresses and personal items on the floor in search of weapons. In the ensuing weeks:

A couple of guys beat the hell out of this guy, and then I heard a guy getting raped in his cell, screaming out to the cop to help him – he couldn’t do nothing until the cop on the floor came in about a half hour later, so that was all bad. And then we get off of lockdown – as soon as we get out, guys start fighting, the cop says “Stop,” and that was it. “Stop” – bamm! [pounding the table to make the sound of a shot]...So you weren’t safe anywhere! That was like in 60 days!

In the highly tense, volatile, and violent conditions individuals entering high security contexts within California prisons first encountered, the first step of the journey was accompanied by a ratcheting up of the nervous system, the development of symptoms of PTSD (Haney, 2003; Kupers & Toch, 1993; DeVeaux, 2013), particularly those deriving from prolonged periods of

hyper-vigilance. While individuals react to traumatic events in different ways, trauma is generally defined as injury, pain, or shock deriving either from a rare unanticipated single event or from anticipated, ongoing, or multiple incidents over time (DeVeaux 2013; p. 261). Prolonged exposure to traumatic events can lead to dissociation, a coping mechanism protecting the individual from absorbing events and experiences that would otherwise overwhelm the emotional machinery in any human body.

The process of witnessing and experiencing this level of violence and exploitation can lead to an adaptive hardening and calcification as individuals spend day after day, year after year in high tension contexts in which visceral and intimate violence is anticipated even if occurring only episodically. Henry, for example – attempting to cope with his sentence of 29 to life at the age of 19 within the volatile and dangerous conditions he encountered in Corcoran – made a deal with himself that he simply would not serve longer than 20 years in prison:

I made a pact with myself that I would not do 20 years in prison. Not gonna do it. So I figure, when that 20-year mark hit, I would do ‘death by C/O.’ And whoever was the biggest asshole cop, I was going to stab him until they shot me. So, I made this promise to myself.

Benjamin described how desensitized he became as a coping mechanism, demonstrating not only the dislocation he experienced in entering a world defined by rivalries and racist ideologies previously foreign to him, but also the dislocation from one’s own emotions that results from long term exposure to traumatic events (DeVeaux, 2015). When I asked Benjamin how he navigated his years in Calipatria, he replied:

You’re always on edge. I never rested in that place. It becomes your lifestyle, so you walk it everyday, but you’re never really right. You convince yourself – there was one time – I’m making everything normal, and I’m on the phone, and I’m looking at some stuff in the day room. And I got back to my cell and I realized I was shaking. I thought it was a normal day – but that stuff sticks with you. You have to normalize it. You’ve got to survive it. But someone got really served, like real bad, and he fell all the way down the steps. And I saw that while I was on the phone before they hit the alarm. By the time I got up they made everyone strip out before going to the cell. I didn’t think I was affected, but I must have been. And you never *talk* about that shit.

The super-maximum contexts to which the “bastards” were assigned given their age and lengths of sentences, and the weaponization and use of force by staff as a strategy of control over violence, translated into an experience of extreme dislocation for these individuals.

Another negative sanction used as a primary “strategy of control” in response to violence and misconduct in the neoliberal era was the use of lockdowns. Lockdowns confine individuals to their cells and prohibit them from working and participating in educational, religious, or other programming; they can be used as a form of quarantine for outbreaks of viruses such as Chicken Pox, but are also employed as a form of punishment and as a means of securing individuals and groups during investigation of fights and other incidents. Throughout the period of expanding prison populations, and as a means of reducing retaliation between factions, lockdowns were imposed on all prisoners assigned to a particular racialized category when individual members of that category were involved in an incident.

Group punishment in the form of lockdowns imposes a particularly direct form of isolation. In addition to confining mainline individuals in their cells, severely hampering their ability to communicate with one another, lockdowns may also restrict rights to family visits, law library materials, receiving packages and publications, and trips to the prison canteen where incarcerated individuals can purchase toiletries and food items (Title 15, p. 85-8). In higher security contexts in particular, lockdowns have become an entirely normal facet of everyday life. After analyzing Program Status Reports (PSRs) issued by the CDCR for the 30 prisons housing men, staff of the Prison Law Office found that 379 security-related lockdowns were imposed over the six-month period from January 1 to June 30, 2009. According to their analysis, the lockdowns in the sample lasted for an average of 109 days (nearly four months), though they note this is a conservative estimate given that several of the lockdowns were not terminated at the time of the sample end date (Specter et. al., 2010).

Benjamin recalled being locked down for six months after the attack on staff – not “leaving the building for six months.” For others entering prisons in the neoliberal era, however, lockdowns dominated the conditions of their confinement. When I asked Tomás to describe his adjustment to life on a level 4 prison mainline, for example, he responded:

The first part of my prison experience was like a lockdown. Isolation. Not really talking to other people. And Mule Creek was a newer prison, so the newer prisons, it's like a science. They got that lockdown figured out. They pop your doors from up there, they feed you through the little tray thing. So there's no interaction with guards at all in there. So the first part of my prison experience, first I was just trying to avoid trouble, avoid having to stab anyone ... So the lockdowns actually saved me during those times, because I'm stuck in the cell and I can't get in trouble in there. And so the first couple of years, that was it – it was just lockdowns.

The lockdown represented a kind of devil's bargain. On one hand, the fact Tomás almost never left his cell protected him from the dangers Benjamin and Henry faced on a level 4 yard. The fact that he was confined with only one other person in a cell reduced the risk of harm to his physical safety, as well as the possibility of obtaining a disciplinary infraction, or, in the most extreme case, being charged with assault and having his sentence extended by the courts. On the flipside, he spent days, weeks, and years at a time confined to a tiny cage, which took a toll of its own on his emotional and mental well-being:

Mule Creek was pretty much two years straight. A year without coming out at all. Only going to showers, no visiting. Only showers and they bring you your food. We used to cover up the windows. And so that was a year in a dark little cell ... That was a year straight, and I remember people were losing it. They were getting that cabin fever, come out and people'd be talking weird. [pause] I don't know how I made it through those times ... I remember waking up sometimes and I couldn't breathe, feeling like, “Fuck, I'm going to be in here all day” ... And by the end, I wasn't doing anything – I wouldn't stand for count, I would move my TV around even though you were supposed to have it in one place. And sometimes the guards would say stuff, and this [one officer] was actually sympathetic. Stuff like that, where people show you kindness, where mostly people are treating you like an animal? I remember that stuff.

But I was an asshole too. One time I went off on this counselor. She comes to the cell and wants us to sign these papers saying we won't participate in gang activity, and I'm like, “This is ridiculous! ... I've never been to the hole, I haven't been in trouble, why do I have to sign these papers?!” ... It was real irritating to me. I hadn't seen my mom in a year, and I just

went off. I was like, “Fuck you! I’ve been in here – and I have to sign something saying I’m not going to do anything? I haven’t done anything in ten years!” And the other guys around me started yelling at her too. She started crying and stuff. I had a lot of internal anger, not at my peers or those around me, but at the system. Like, this is some fucked up shit.

These lockdowns offered an attractive strategy of control for prison officials in that, particularly in newer facilities, the design of the housing units ensured officers had little extra work and no contact with prisoners locked in their cells. This strategy served to isolate and confine individuals for long periods of time in highly restrictive conditions, not only minimizing their contact with each other and with prison staff, but also, in some cases, eliminating visits from family and friends in the community. As such, this punitive strategy of control also served to produce extreme conditions of dislocation among the incarcerated.

Innovations in contemporary prison construction have increased surveillance and automation of prison housing units, not only through the implementation of camera systems and other technologies, but through the design of the units themselves. Confining individuals in highly restrictive, surveilled, and automated conditions served as another primary “strategy of control,” incapacitating individuals designated as posing high risks of violence and punishing those who participated in the leadership structures within their racialized group.

In the new prisons constructed during the neoliberal era, housing units known as “One Eighties” and “Two Seventies” were constructed to maximize control and surveillance of their inhabitants. In these units, cells are visible to custody staff along a one hundred and eighty degree (or two hundred seventy degree) turn radius. As such, custody staff in one position turn their bodies (and their weapons) from side to side for a full visual scan of all cells and prisoners in the unit. In describing the 180 design constructed at New Folsom prison in 1986, a Grand Jury report outlined the design and its purposes thus:

‘One-eighty’ refers to the design of the cell blocks (housing units) which are partitioned into three separate, self-contained sections forming a 180 degree half circle. The partitioning of sections, blocks and facilities ensures maximum control of movement and swift, decisive isolation of disruptive inmates, allowing effective management of a large inmate population (Sacramento Grand Jury, 1998).

When individuals are suspected of gang involvement and validated as a gang member or associate, they are sent to a secure housing unit (SHU) to serve a definite or indefinite term in long-term solitary confinement. Though the first such unit was opened in Arizona in 1986, California opened the two largest modern super-maximum units in 1988 and 1989 at Pelican Bay and Corcoran (Reiter, 2012). As of 2012, approximately 3300 individuals incarcerated in these units spent their days in long-term solitary confinement and in conditions of extreme sensory deprivation often for indefinite periods of time that have lasted, in the most extreme cases, upwards of 20 years.

Criminologist Keramet Reiter (2012) describes the conditions in the California SHUs in the following terms:

Prisoners remain in their supermax cells 23 to 24 hours a day. The fluorescent lights are always on, day and night. Meals arrive through a small slot in an automated cell door. Prisoners leave their cells four or five times per week for showers or for brief, solitary exercise periods in ‘dog runs’ – concrete pens with roofs only partially open to natural light.

They have little to no human contact for weeks, months, or even years at a time (531).

These units, described by prison officials as confining the “worst of the worst” among the prison population, offer a stark contrast to the system of segregation imposed in the “correctional institution” era, in which nearly 40 percent of prisoners in the facility Messinger (1969) studied were confined in honor units with high levels of freedom of movement. Though some individuals in that period were confined in “adjustment centers,” sinister housing blocks where their freedom of movement was restricted and the conditions of confinement were dirty and dilapidated, this represented a small portion of the population who did not conform to the incentive structure in place. In the neoliberal era, honor units no longer exist, and instead, the units notorious for housing the “worst of the worst” become a desired destination for some prisoners who, given the isolation and lack of meaningful opportunities they encounter within the system, settle instead on a compensatory path towards honor and prestige.

Anthony, for example, was already quite familiar with the expectations he would encounter upon entry to prison, and was primed to serve time in the most inhospitable prison environments, in which the notoriety of the brutal violence one might encounter served as a compensatory form of recognition. In recalling his path towards incarceration, Anthony told me:

There came a point in my life where I knew jail was in my path. And that was at 13 probably. I remember the first time I started hanging around, claiming the ‘hood, I was eight years old. I got jumped in by one guy. But I was just a kid, I didn’t know much. But there came a point where, “Nah, fuck that. I don’t want to be a gang member.” And people were being killed and all that. And I resisted. I played baseball. But when I got to high school, I wasn’t allowed to play baseball. So I got into tagging and even that – it was chill ... Just destroying property [laughing]. Vandalism.

But then a lot of my friends started getting jumped into gangs, and it just became part of our lifestyle – or deathstyle, really. So it – “Oh, prisons, jails” – I’d see homies get out. And it became a status thing, like, “I’ve been to juvenile hall,” “I’ve been to prison,” “I’ve been to CYA.” So I remember one time in 8th or 9th grade my teacher asking me where would I be in five years, and I did that whole Snoop Dogg thing, like, “I’m going to be in county jail!” And I was in jail by the age of 17.

After a six-month stint in juvenile camp for selling drugs, Anthony returned to Norwalk to find that two of his friends had been shot. One was killed, and the other was in critical condition in the local hospital. Anthony went to the hospital the same day he was released, and sickened by the scene, embraced the gang-banging “deathstyle.” About nine months later, he and three other friends were charged and convicted for a car-jacking.

Because the other young people he was hanging out with already had prison experience, Anthony already knew what to expect when he was incarcerated:

I knew a lot about prison going into prison. I knew the places to go to, Pelican Bay, Palm Hall in Chino – Palm Hall is a very notorious place, or it used to be. Corcoran SHU – any hole. Any hole in a reception center or on a level 4 is a good place to be – supposedly. I was very infatuated with that. Oh, I’m going to the Pelican Bay SHU. So I already knew about all that shit going into prison. Before I got busted, I was running around with four guys – three had been to prison, and one of the ones had been to prison and another guy had been to CYA. One got out of the SHU; one got out of the hole. One had just gotten out of Lancaster – which had just opened up at the time. And when a new prison just

opened, it's always hectic for a while. So I knew the things to do, not to do. At a very young age – going into prison – I knew what prisons not to go to.

While the SHU and other notorious contexts were glorified as places to make a name for oneself, other yards maintained the opposite reputation given that they are reserved for the protective custody of individuals who “snitch,” or provide information about other prisoners’ illicit activities; who have “dropped out” of prison politics, leaving the organizations to which they swore a vow; or who were convicted for offenses that are stigmatized on the mainline.

In describing which yards were considered “good news” yards and which were considered “bad news” yards, Anthony continued:

At that time, Tehachapi was a bad place to go to ... And when I went to Wasco, they told me that they were going to send me to Tehachapi – and when I was in Wasco, no one knew about that shit. They're all level 1, level 2, violations. But there was just one guy who was level 4 – he had been in Calipatria, he knew some of my homies from Norwalk – and he told me, “Hey homie, be careful when you go to Tehachapi – you got a 90 day limit.” I go, “What’s that?” “You’re gonna be there for 90 days.” “Why?” “It’s only rats, rapists, and child molesters, and all that shit.”

When the other man with a conviction resulting in level 4 points tells Anthony that he’s got a “90-day limit,” he is informing him that if he does not do something to remove himself from the Tehachapi yard, it will reflect poorly on his “paperwork,” and he may be liable for “removal” from the mainline if he were transferred from Tehachapi to another yard or facility. As Anthony mentally prepared to be transferred to Tehachapi, he began thinking through how to be removed in such a way that would guarantee him the most possible prestige:

I was getting adjusted to that mentality, that shit, like I may need to stab somebody or do something to get me off this yard. And this is me thinking – this is the way that I’m thinking – making sure that I hit somebody where people were going to think, “Oh, you got the big fish.” So my mind was very much set into prison for the first, maybe, seven years. I was like, “This is it. This is where I’m at.”

For Anthony, and others like him, the most notorious contexts in the California prison system became the endpoint on the compensatory paths towards meaning and purpose they adopted given the extreme dislocations they experienced both before and during their incarceration. Rather than working towards maintaining good conduct in order to be housed in a unit with greater freedom of movement, they began envisioning the most dangerous and violent possible conduct they could engage in to make their way into the most isolating, dehumanizing, and restrictive settings. They found honor, not in the units that would provide them the most individuality and autonomy, but through avenues enforcing militarization, violence, and conformity to group allegiances and identities.

Conclusion: “I’m Going to Do This Forever!”

As the State abandoned the rehabilitative philosophy in the neoliberal era, prison officials implemented a contradictory and destructive set of strategies which imposed extremely long sentences rather than incentives for early release, ceded management of the prison population to prisoners themselves, imposed racialized identities rather than individualized treatment plans, and punished rather than rewarded. These strategies further isolated, dislocated, and punished the

“bastards,” and in these toxic and destructive conditions, many adopted destructive pathways toward meaning, honor, and prestige. The militarized hierarchies vying for equality and resources provided a clear career ladder for these youth.

When Sparky was embraced by the “White” population upon transfer to the adult system, he told me he in turn embraced prison life, gaining a newfound sense of motivation:

Once I saw what the program was, I was on board. In fact, I distinctly remember uttering those words with joy: “I’m going to do this forever!” So once I made – well, I’ve always – the same drive that got me to Berkeley got me to be in the Pelican Bay SHU: “I’m going to be all I can be.”

Given Sparky’s extreme dislocation in his home and neighborhood, and his adolescence spent in isolation in the Intractable Ward Program in the California Youth Authority, the community, belonging, and relative freedoms he experienced in the adult prison system provided a compensatory sense of identity and purpose he profoundly needed. Without alternative pathways offering purpose and prestige, such as higher education, and without means of processing trauma, such as therapeutic environments, the most available and valorized pathway for motivated individuals under neoliberal penalty entails making it to the most restrictive and dehumanizing carceral spaces.

In Part Three, we examine how, even within the highly destructive and isolating conditions of neoliberal penalty, the “bastards” found intimate bonds to self, others, and paths that enabled them to survive prison, resist their conditions, and develop a “generative” orientation (Erikson, 1993).

PART THREE: PRIVATE ACTS OF SURVIVAL, RESISTANCE, & RECONNECTION

Despite the deep and ongoing dislocations they experienced in their lives previous to and during incarceration in the neoliberal era, the “bastards” found ways of surviving and resisting their conditions by forming meaningful and genuine forms of reconnection. Given the abandonment of the rehabilitative philosophy and “strategies of control” under neoliberal punishment, these forms of reconnection most frequently occurred through the acts of private individuals.

The “bastards” may have experienced a moment of radical honesty and intimacy with themselves at some point during their confinement, which served as a pivotal turning point redirecting their attention and perspective. They may have received a word of advice from another incarcerated individual, a book, or an offer of support which assisted them as they began seeking a different path. As their lives of confinement unfolded over months and years, they may have encountered meaningful opportunities to process their emotions and to gain exposure to new skills and ideas in the meager state-run education and vocational programs that survived in the neoliberal era, in the correspondence courses offered by colleges, and in the efforts of volunteers to provide prison programming.

Anthropologist James Ferguson (2010) warns against depicting neoliberal policy as monolithic and all-encompassing, pointing to how a “specific ‘neoliberal’ technique,” like a privatized service once under the purview of the state, or a public-private partnership, can operate within but achieve goals counter to the philosophies underlying the broader, “hegemonic ‘neoliberal’ political-economic project” (p. 275). Quoting Collier (2005, p. 2), Ferguson argues the relationship between the technical and the political-economic in the neoliberal context is “much more polymorphous and unstable than is assumed” (2010, p. 275).

Following Ferguson, in the chapters that form Part Three, I trace how private actors, with the limited resources available to them, adopted practices and models operating within neoliberal prisons that simultaneously worked against the neoliberal strategies of institutional racialization, segregation, and punishment. The testimonies of the “bastards” suggest that the development of a “generative orientation,” or the propensity to give back to the community and specifically to improve the lives of future generations, though linked by developmental psychologists to maturation and middle-adulthood (Erikson, 1993), can also be triggered by the formation meaningful connections.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

Intimacy as Physical and Psychological Survival

Ironically, it may be during imprisonment that the “bastards” first receive the mentorship, attention, and protection from older individuals they may have lacked in their home lives, neighborhoods, and schools. More seasoned prisoners come to stand in for the probation officers, teachers, parents, older siblings, and counselors who proved unable to protect them in their lives before prison. And the guidance they provide can assist young people to find a semblance of relative autonomy and security in the highly contested and chaotic prison environment – to avoid dynamics in which their already constrained autonomy is even more attenuated. These prisoners pass on advice, insight, rituals, and routines essential for surviving over the course of long-term imprisonment in the dislocating conditions of confinement characterizing neoliberal penalty.

In the nooks and crannies of neoliberal prisons, individuals find bits of information and ideas that offer them the whisper of a different set of possibilities, and they support each other’s development by passing on whatever information they get their hands on, breaking the spine of books so that they can slide them under cell doors, hand-copying texts they find particularly meaningful, offering encouraging messages in passing moments on the prison yard.

The relationships incarcerated individuals form through supporting each other to connect to different paths serve as a form of resistance to the dehumanizing conditions they encounter in high security contexts. And these relationships often form across the divisions generally characterizing and limiting interaction within the prison world, as they recognize shared humanity and temporarily and fleetingly transcend the dehumanizing conditions and divisions characterizing their confinement.

The connections individuals form when they first enter prison reception centers and mainlines are often essential to their physical survival. When Henry was first transferred to Corcoran’s mainline, a path for survival was laid out by the circle of Native American prisoners with whom he was categorized. In addition to the review of his “paperwork” and a breaking down of their group’s territory – the cafeteria and yard tables, handball courts, telephones, showers, and other areas that have been carved out for their use, Henry’s welcome by the individuals composing the “Native American circle” on this yard also involved some meaningful advice on comportment while confined:

He came around and he says, “You’re your own man. Now it’s different because people want to use you” – ‘cause I was young when I went in – I was 19. And so, you know, they want ‘em as torpedoes and all that stuff, so he came up and he said, “I’m gonna teach you right. I’ve been doing this for a while. You don’t do anything you don’t want to do. If somebody comes up and gives you a knife, you just stab him with it because that man’s a coward, or else he would do it himself. Don’t let anybody pressure you into anything; if you don’t want to do it, tell them ‘No.’ If you don’t want to do something, you don’t say nothing. Only speak up if you’re gonna do it. Your word is what you are. So if your word is shit, you’re shit. Don’t mess with homosexuals, don’t mess with drugs, don’t mess with alcohol, don’t gamble, and don’t get into any debts that you can’t pay. If you do those things, you’re gonna be all right. Mind your own business. If you’re minding your own business, you can’t be in other peoples’ business. And nobody likes someone in their business.” So, sound advice! And it kept me alive.

After the several week lockdown lifted, the members of this circle were presented with an opportunity to learn how Henry responded to potential conflict. They used this moment to grant Henry the opportunity to establish himself as someone who was willing to defend himself, thus saving him from potential tests and attempts at exploitation that might otherwise come his way. Henry recalled:

My first day on the yard, I went out, and I jumped on a handball court, 'cause we had been talking about playing handball ... Then the Southsiders come out, and say, "Hey man, you need to get off the court." And I'm like, "Who the fuck are you?" – right? So we go into this thing, and it was Ramon – later on we became pretty good friends – but at that moment he was squaring off, and I'm like, "What are you trying to do, punk somebody off this court? I was already here!" And he's like, "You need to go talk to your people," and I'm like, "I don't need to do shit!"

And so all the Indians are watching this. And then finally ... they're like, "Henry!" ... And I walk off, and I walk over, and he's like, "Uh, that's a Southsider court." And I'm like, "*What?*" And he's like, "Yeah. Our court's right there." And I'm like, "How could" – And he goes, "Well we just wanted to see what was gonna happen." And so I went back – *he* wasn't part of it, not the Southsider – so I went back, and I said, "Apparently I was in the wrong, so I apologize." And I walked over to the other court. And so from that day, I was already locked in, and I didn't even have to do nothin.'

Nicole: Locked in? How?

Henry: I was in good standing with the Indians, good standing with the Southerners, good standing with the Whites. Because—

Nicole: Because they were testing you to see if you were going to back down?

Henry: Yeah! But I wasn't aware of all that – I mean, I *should* have been aware – but I was just, I was just trying to fit in, like "What am I supposed to do, where am I supposed to go?" And all I know is, *don't be punked!*

The seasoned American Indian prisoners allowed the situation to unfold, making use of the hypervisibility of the encounter for all to witness how Henry handled himself. They intervened before the interaction escalated into a physical fight, which would be harmful to both individuals involved and could potentially spur ongoing tensions among the Natives and the Southerners. In this skillful manipulation, the more experienced members of Henry's circle demonstrate their knowledge not only of the territorial dynamics at play on that particular yard, but also the exact escalation points at which to intervene to ensure Henry has demonstrated his willingness to engage without coming to blows.

These individuals are assisted by Ramon, who understood better than Henry was capable of at the time that Henry was being tested. Highly uninterested in escalating the encounter, Ramon assisted Henry's "people" by urging him to learn the rules from them before reacting to Henry's provocations with violence. Through this interaction, Ramon and the elders in the Native American circle assisted Henry in establishing himself as someone willing to defend himself without forcing him to follow through, ensuring his "good standing" throughout the population of incarcerated individuals on that yard.

By allowing the incident with Ramon to unfold, the more seasoned Native American prisoners provide Henry with an opportunity to communicate through his willingness to defend his

right to the handball court that he will not be easily exploited – that he is not a “punk.” And in so doing, they facilitate Henry’s “good standing” on the yard while avoiding violent conflict and maintaining equilibrium among the various racialized groups.

The circle of Native prisoners also provided security measures by which they watched out for their members in spaces where solitary prisoners may be particularly vulnerable:

So there was one time where I just came in, I went straight to the showers, nobody saw me. And they were like, “Did Henry come back? Yeah, he’s back.” Went and checked my cell, wasn’t there ... And they were panicked. ‘Cause they don’t know if I got dragged in somebody’s cell or something. And I’m in the Northern shower on the bottom, and they’re like, “Are you in there Henry?” I say, “Yeah.” “Well you need to tell a motherfucker that you’re in the building!” and all this stuff ... And they’re like, “It’s about security, buddy. So, okay, we’re cool with everybody, but in case somebody wants to do something, we gotta know who’s in the building in case we gotta look for you. So we saw you coming in and then you disappeared. So we’re just making sure that you’re alright” ... And so once they explained it, and it just stayed with me. Anytime I was on the grounds and I came in I just checked with someone: “Hey, I’m gonna be on the court, I’m gonna be at school,” so they would always know where I’m at. In case an alarm jumps off, to see if I came out or anything. And they did the same thing for me: “Hey Hen, I’m gonna be over here.” So I always knew where everybody was.

While for Henry, the means of survival and protection were provided on a collective level, for others, survival comes down to forming a deeply trusting interpersonal bond. Benjamin’s survival strategy involved forming relationships with other “non-constitutional” prisoners within the broader “Black” population whom he encountered on the yards to which he was transferred over the course of his incarceration, beginning at Calipatria:

My own strategy that I picked up on just from paying attention to things, is that whenever I touch down on any mainline, I found out some other people – solid people – who weren’t constitutional either? And we made our own vows that we would protect each other while we were on the yards. In Calipatria, it was an OG named Smoky. He was from Hanford, Fresno area, but he wasn’t cliqued up either. And we lifted weights together, and we said, “On this yard, we die together. You watch mine, I watch yours” kind of thing. And we respected that the whole way. They actually thought that he was my uncle, because we were that tight. And that’s what allowed us to get through.

For Anthony, who was first assigned to a highly restrictive 180 housing unit with High Desert State Prison, a relationship that formed as a means of survival also laid the groundwork for the process of self-exploration and reconnection he would undergo over the next 15 years of his confinement. The geographic isolation he experienced during incarceration nearly 1000 miles from his family and neighborhood in Los Angeles, and the dislocation he experienced in a highly restrictive, sterile, and surveilled housing unit was mitigated to some degree by the fact that he recognized so many young people from the streets, juvenile detention, and the LA County Jail when he entered the section of the 180 in which he would be confined:

They walked us over from R&R all the way to fucking C-yard, and during February in High Desert where it’s fucking snowing and shit. Two in the morning, chains rattling, just in your chancas and your boxers ... We went to C-1 ... And I see a dude that’s in there and I knew him from juvenile hall, and he’s like, “Oh, what’s up dude! You’re going to be my cellie! Oh, no? Oh, you’re going to the other side? Well, homie is over there! And another homie is

over there too!” It’s all from juvenile hall. And he’s like, “I’m going to give you cosmetics!” So we walk over to the other pod, and the first person I see is another person that I know from the LA County Jail. And he pulls out two boxes from under his bed and it’s full of Mexican candy and I just ate that shit up ... It’s a bunch of fucking kids, man. I mean, there’s some older dudes too, but it’s a lot of fucking kids.

These dislocated and peer-oriented youth, who have formed relationships in the detention centers and jails in which they served time in adolescence, reunite and provide each other with a semblance of familiarity and comfort in the highly restrictive units in the adult system. In his cell in the 180 Anthony was confined with another youth from Bakersfield who played an important role in his life:

So then I celled up with this cool-ass dude from Bakersfield. He was only two years older than me, but he’s done two SHU terms ... He was like, “I know your homie so and so, and we opened this place up.” High Desert opened up in January, 1996. And he was like, “We were on the first bus ... I’m going to show you the ropes” ... Even though he was only two years older than me, he was like going to take me under his wing ... So we were together for two years, and then he got caught up in some shit on the yard, and went to the SHU, and then he ended up being validated.

For the two years they were celled together, Anthony’s cellmate provided him with the information and advice to navigate the politics on the prison yard; he also introduced Anthony to different perspectives that encouraged him to begin a process of self-reflection. This period was the beginning of a series of changes in perspective that Anthony was hungry for, and which he pursued throughout his incarceration in the 270s, 180s, and SHUs across the California prison system:

When I was with my homie from Bakersfield, he was the one who introduced me to Zen. He had some stuff – not actual magazines, but articles that he had copied down by hand. It was pretty fucking dope. It talked about Zen Buddhism, and they had this story about these two Buddhist monks walking through the rain, and they come to a river, and there was a woman who needed to go to the other side. And one monk took the woman to the other side, and then they kept walking. And the one who helped her was cool, but the other one was pissed. When they got to the monastery, the other monk went off and said, “Why are you picking her up, that’s against the rules!” And the other guy said, “Why are you still carrying her? I left her back there.” So good stories that would fuck with your brain and shit.

And so after that I started subscribing to Trycycle – or something like that – this Zen Buddhist magazine. And there was another article by this Buddhist monk talking about how “God Is a Chocolate Cake.” [laughing] But he’s critiquing Western society, like, hard core. And this is something that really started moving me away from my materialistic urges – “Oh I want this and I want that.” He said how in Western society we like to talk about God, but we don’t actually practice religion. Just because we go to the temple and we think it’s all good, and then you get caught up with consumer stuff and all these things, whereas when something bad happens that’s when we think about it instead of living like that everyday.

And I was like, “Oh shit, that’s me too.” “I want two packages, I want 10 CDs.” So after a while I stopped ordering CDs, I stopped asking my mom for money and all that, especially once I got to the SHU – \$300 bucks I would stretch out for the whole year.

In the conditions of near total isolation he encountered in the SHU, Anthony's physical survival was less in question than his psychological and emotional survival. He and the members of his "pod," the eight cells composing a unit within the SHU, found creative ways to form community despite the dehumanizing conditions in which they were confined. In describing how he first assimilated to the community inside his pod, Anthony recalled the different ways they found to communicate with one another and shared resources.

These included yelling between the cells and through vents, touching fingers when each person was released for an hour to go to the "yard" – commonly referred to as a "dog run" – or passing books and food underneath cell doors. Anthony described how he would make tamales out of smashed corn chips in his cell, and then ask the control guard in the tower – who he referred to as "the dude upstairs" – if he could pop open Anthony's cell door so he could slide the tamales under the cell doors of those in his pod. He continued:

We didn't call these things acts of resistance – but – they were ways to cope. Like I used to love laughing, right? There was this show where they'd set people up on these dates and I would laugh so hard. Laughter was always a thing for me. There used to be this Tide commercial ... and it was with all these old people, and their clothes come back from the laundry all bright, and everybody starts dancing. And we would all laugh at that shit – like yelling out to the old dudes, "That's you, that's you!" And all the partners were just fucking rolling. Everybody was just fucking laughing and shit. You would see that a lot, right? ... So we would find ways to keep shit light.

The camaraderie Anthony encountered in the SHU provided a form a humanizing resistance and psychological survival within conditions of extreme "mechanistic dehumanization" (Haslam, 2006).

For others, rather than forming collective or interpersonal bonds, they cope with their situation through intimacy with self, the exploration of their internal worlds. In describing how he coped with the predicament of being stuck on lockdown for years, Tomás explained:

You know what? This is even before I knew about Buddhism, I knew that – I adopted this idea that everything changes always, and time is always passing, and this is just something I gotta go through. It's not going to be like this forever. I can make it through today, and not even worry about tomorrow. And you do it like that. One day at a time ... And you just have to breathe. You have to think, "What am I going to do *right now*?" Make coffee, watch *Regis and Kelly*. So I got into that living right here, right now...

I used to do some weird stuff ... I would think, my whole life is just in my brain. My family only knows me as a thought or a memory, because we weren't seeing each other or touching each other. And so if I just sit here, my body is just sitting here, so my whole life is only going on in my brain. I remember reading later on that Descartes was doing similar stuff – like locking himself in his room. And I would do similar stuff – just think hours and hours in my head. I was just stuck not doing anything, but still it felt like I was doing something – I don't know.

The coping mechanism of connecting and exploring ones internal world translated for some into moments of radical honesty, which then served as a turning point in their pursuit of a different life path. In discussing the roots of the psychological and spiritual exploration he embarked upon

during confinement, Raymond, for example, revisited one such moment in the week or two before he was arrested for shooting the young man interested in his sister:

I came home one time and I felt really empty ... I felt really disconnected to me. But I dropped to my knees, and I started praying for the first time in I don't know how many years ... I said, "God I'm sorry that I haven't prayed in a long time, but it's not that I don't believe in you. It's just that I'm ashamed of myself. I'm ashamed to even talk to you. I really need to get out of here now. I feel like I really need to go somewhere where I can think, and be alone, where there's no women, no drugs, no money."

In realizing how dislocated he was from himself given the three-year whirlwind of drug dealing, partying, and violence in which he had been engaged, Raymond was spurred to seek spiritual connection, and in so doing, he admitted to the underlying sense of loneliness, shame, and helplessness underlying his brazen arrogance and aggression. This moment of prayer and honesty translated into an acceptance of his arrest and confinement, enabling him to cope psychologically with the dislocation of incarceration he was about to experience:

Within about two weeks, I was in that jail cell ... And there was no women, no money, and I was by myself. No drugs, no power, no bodyguards. Just me. Like, naked me ... When I was in that cell by myself in county jail was the Bible. And I opened this damn book – I don't even really trip on the Bible – I hate organized religion. But the text my eyes go to, in the book of Paul, it says, "It's better that I am here, learning how to live, rather than out there dying." And from that point forward, it was like, "Oh fuck, there's a higher power or some shit. And I'm on a path. And I asked to be here. I *requested* to be here." And that awareness on its own started me on this path of growth.

For Raymond, it was in this moment that he stopped feeling the existential vulnerability of dislocation, and began experiencing his vulnerability as a form of sustenance and strength. The sense of no longer being lost, of instead being on a path, was in his estimation the essential catalyst of his growth. From that point forward, the prison became his monastery, and he interpreted his experiences within as designed in some way to teach him lessons and facilitate his personal development. When he arrived on a level 4 yard at High Desert, for example, he encountered an officer who was widely hated, but whose treatment Raymond interpreted as integral to his spiritual journey:

This guy used to make us get on our hands and knees and scrub the cracks between the ... concrete tiles [in the housing unit] ... So he would make us get on our knees and scrub these cracks so they could look white again. He was the only person in the whole institution making people do this ... Right before I got to scrub the cracks, this book came to me. I don't even remember the titles of these books anymore, but the book talked about – it was about Buddhism – but it talked about how when you first get to the temple ... what you have to do is get on your hands and knees and scrub the floor ... So when I got to scrub the cracks, the thing that came to my mind was that book I just got my hands on a few days ago, and I was like, "Fuck. I'm where I'm supposed to be." And I got on my hands and knees and I scrubbed the cracks [long pause]. And I didn't have a problem with it [heavy pause]. It was actually a liberating experience ... It feels good to just get on your hands and knees and just scrub crap for a while. Because I didn't scrub crap for anybody. I used to think that people should scrub crap for me. And that's how I used to treat people. I could never have someone I could really love. Because I thought people should serve me.

Raymond translates the demands of this officer into a lesson in humility and service, and interprets the lesson as essential in his slow and incremental development of the ability to find genuine love and intimacy. For Raymond, then, who had always adopted an independent approach whether in street life or in terms of his affiliation in prison, the path of growth involved developing healthy relationships not only with himself, but particularly with other people.

A few years into his confinement, Raymond was assisted in the process by a young man who was active in prison politics with whom he sometimes played handball. Though Raymond continued to maintain a hatred for gang members, he connected with this young man, and this connection also proved pivotal in him reexamining his relationship to his father, who continued as a source of powerful resentment:

My father was being abusive to my mother ... And I told my mother it was time to tell my father it's time to leave the home. And she said, "He says he won't go because this is his house" ... And then I said, "And I'm going to talk to him about that." And I didn't say that in a negative, aggressive way. I said it in a sweet way. Because I was very sneaky in my ways. ... So, what I was entertaining was, I was going to have my father either killed or severely beat up, and the message was going to be, "You get the fuck out of the house or you die."

But I'm talking to this young Sureno guy – he was my age – but he was just a very soothing, kind of, calming, his personality, he was just a kind of calm dude. And you know I hate those people, but he was just a cool dude ... So I confided in him. I told him, "My father is acting up." Because he had told me how dysfunctional *his* father was towards his mother. And I said, "I'm dealing with something similar. And I'm really thinking about having him whacked. I'm tired of having this motherfucker hurting my family."

And he said, "I'm just going to tell you one thing that you should consider. When my father was dealing with his addiction, he used to be very mean to the family. And then he got sober, and he changed, and he's actually very responsible now. And of all the people" – 'cause he had been locked up since he was a kid – and he said, "Of all the people who have been in my life, my dad has supported me always and he's always been there, and even with his flaws, he has never turned his back on me."

And he touched a nerve in me, because even with all the bullshit he was putting my mom through, the motherfucker had been there for me – financially. He was bringing mom to visit. In his own weird way, he was always there for me ... And it was a big lesson, because here I was judging this person, and I had been doing the same things in different ways. I wasn't yelling at my mom or being verbally abusive, and yet I had hurt my mom in other ways, even more ways, and here I was judging him, and he wasn't judging me ... And it woke me up – I was like, "You know what, man, forgiveness is something that you should look at. Because you do need a lot of people to forgive you – have you ever thought about forgiving one person in your life?"

The advice of this young man, and the fact that Raymond chose to confide in him about a highly personal matter, translated into another lesson for Raymond, another moment of awareness about the hypocrisy and internal conflict he was acting out through his resentment towards his father. Though Raymond had already attached to a path, the fact that his kneejerk reaction towards his father continued to involve the most extreme violence also illuminates the incremental and multifaceted process of growth he underwent.

These moments of fleeting but significant intimacy can serve as catalysts by providing alternative perspectives on one's condition. For Gabriel, for example, it was the suggestion of

another older prisoner in the reception center that provided him with a helpful nudge. When he was first confined in 2002, San Quentin's Reception Center was "infilled" with bunks crammed into the passageways and spaces usually left empty as walkways and offices on the bottom floor of the cellblock. These areas – known as "broadways" – became ubiquitous as a means of storing overflowing prisoners, and were often located in gyms, classrooms, and walkways of the prisons.

Bored and unable to sit still, Gabriel at first resorted to "hopping tiers" to keep himself busy over the nine months he spent in lockdown conditions in the reception center:

I would go hideout in the Broadway. 'Cause those dudes had no cells ... When we were getting back from chow, I'd go hide out in the back by the showers, and when they do the sweeps, I would just climb the tiers on the outside.

When Gabriel was eventually caught, they'd place him in what he calls the "dummy box," cages the size of a phone booth used as punishments or holding cells for individuals waiting for appointments with medical staff or counselors. He continued:

So then for a minute I was always in the dummy box – the cage you can't sit down in. So instead of going to chow, they'd give me a meal in there. So then I'd start playing them, and I'd go hop in the box because they didn't lock it when it was empty – and then they'd walk by and say, "Oh Masterson, you're in the box again?" And I'd be like, "Yup, you know me Sarge." And then after they walked by, I'd let myself out of the cage and hop the tiers again.

At some point during this phase, an older prisoner, perhaps witnessing Gabriel's struggles to adjust to his confinement, provided some basic but meaningful advice that helped him to begin seeking different means of occupying his time:

But so the first thing that got me interested – there was this older dude, he was political. And he was like, "You know what G, you're a sharp youngster. I know you were doin' your thing on the street. But if you do half the stuff you do on the street doing something productive?" He was like, "Why don't you do some rappin' or something" – but the point was that he was saying, do something productive.

Not too long after this, Gabriel spotted a book on the Broadway, and asked someone to bring it up to him in his cell. And in this moment, he encountered something with which he could personally identify, and which provided him with a different way of seeing his own experience:

The book was an unabridged version of *Romeo & Juliet*. And I knew of the story, I had kinda like, flipped through it. But I sat down and I read it cover to cover. And after that, I was reading everything. And I felt so good, because it was the first time I analyzed something – not had somebody else tell me what the curriculated responses and all the other bullshit. And I was like, Romeo was thuggin'. The opening scene is fighting. And Romeo's thing was like, he liked Juliet because she wasn't from around there, she was classy – she went to college. So it just sparked something in me. I had an appetite.

Gabriel personally related to the story of Romeo, who in the midst of "thuggin,'" fell in love with a "classy" woman who was "not from around there," just as Gabriel fell in love with his first wife while in the UK. And in uncovering the connections between *Romeo & Juliet* and his own life, he also connected to the joy of interpreting and analyzing great works of literature for himself. He began asking his mother to research the syllabi of courses offered at universities, and to send him

the books they assigned, seeking out that experience throughout the remainder of his incarceration. And he used it as tool for developing a deeper understanding of his personal experience. In reading Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, for example, which a white prisoner named "Psycho" passed him in a moment of empathy, Gabriel saw himself in the anti-hero Raskolnikov, who, Gabriel told me, committed murder to distinguish himself as someone who would do things that other people wouldn't. In analyzing his own path towards violence, Gabriel began to realize that he and his friends on the streets sought recognition through the same strategy.

Conclusion: Private Acts of Intimacy With Self and Others

The "bastards" found ways of connecting with one another, with older incarcerated individuals, and with themselves even amidst the extreme conditions of dislocation and isolation characterizing the neoliberal prison. These efforts – to hand copy texts, to share a book, to confide in another person, or to have a deeply honest and personal reckoning with oneself, served as pivotal moments leading towards meaningful reconnection. Though these acts occurred outside the formal support of state-funded or volunteer-run programs, the "bastards" were fortunate to make use of the meager resources at their disposal to begin exploring themselves and finding antidotes to the dislocation and ideological conformity towards which the "strategies of control" implemented in the neoliberal prison otherwise pushed them.

As they began the process of reconnection, the "bastards" also found more formalized pathways and sites of support for their endeavors. Through college correspondence courses, state-funded vocational and educational programs, and volunteer-run programs, they were able to connect with one another in the pursuit of an alternative vision for their future and a productive means of serving time. The connections they formed in assisting one another towards these pursuits challenged the racialized divisions otherwise characterizing their social worlds, suggesting that the opportunity to connect to a meaningful path trumps the divides and ideologies imposed through the institutional racialization process.

CHAPTER EIGHT:

Rehabilitation in the Shadows of Neoliberal Penalty

Recent scholarship has pointed to over-generalization in previous academic descriptions of the rehabilitative decline, arguing that in practice rehabilitative programs continued to operate at least to some degree within prisons under neoliberal penalty (Phelps, 2011). In California, state-sponsored provision of literacy and GED classes and vocational programs indeed continued under neoliberal penalty. The “strategies of control” guided by the rehabilitative philosophy and implemented in the “correctional institution” era, however – which provided sentences, classification processes, credits, and segregated housing units incentivizing good conduct and participation in work, therapy, and school (Messinger, 1969; Irwin 1980) – were eliminated. In the neoliberal era, the meaningful pathway dislocated and peer-oriented youth encouraged each other to adopt glorified the most violent and notorious spaces in the system, and disdained those who “programmed” as weak and unable to handle the brutal realities of prison yards. In this sense, then, despite the ongoing availability of certain educational, religious, and vocational programs, rehabilitation truly was abandoned.

Moreover, the availability of prison programming did not rise in proportion to the growing population and programs have consistently maintained extremely long waiting lists (Mukamal et. al., 2015). There was a particular lack of availability in higher security environments where the “bastards” and all those serving life sentences usually began their confinement. And the educational and vocational programs operating in prisons have been demonstrated to be of inconsistent and sometimes very poor quality, with vocational programs no longer relevant to the labor market or in areas where individuals with criminal records are prohibited from attaining licenses, as one example (Lin, 2002; Mukamal et. al., 2015).

To the extent that college programs operated in prisons nationally in the 1970s and 1980s, their primary source of funding was cut in 1994 by federal legislation prohibiting incarcerated students from Pell Grant eligibility, leading to a state-wide elimination of on-site post-secondary opportunities in prisons (Page, 2004).

In this relative vacuum, a few rehabilitative options remained available, particularly on lower security yards. These options included correspondence courses operated by private and community colleges; the state-funded educational and vocational training programs; and the efforts of programs such as AA, NA, and Alternatives to Violence, which were operated by volunteers in a few prisons throughout the system. These opportunities, which operate without the support of the “strategies of control” operative in the “correctional institution” era, provided formalized support to the “bastards” and other incarcerated individuals as they continued pursuing their paths of growth. They also offered a means by which individuals could connect across the divisions generally characterizing social relations in the racialized neoliberal prison.

For Anthony, the consistent encouragement and support of the incarcerated individuals around him was crucial at each step of the educational path he eventually connected. Anthony had not earned a high school diploma or GED when he entered prison, and when he was first confined in the 180 at High Desert, he found few options for productively occupying his time:

The fucked up thing was that because of that – when I got to High Desert, the first two and a half years on the 180 – when we weren’t locked down – I was A2B – I was not assigned to a job. So I didn’t have that for two years so I was very limited. I was just a yard bum. I just

went to the yard, played handball, and stuff like that. Reading was very limited ... They just had this bullshit-ass education program at High Desert, and I ended up getting in there my last couple months there ... But in High Desert, there were really no programs there.

Instead of finding support and encouragement in formal educational programs, Anthony found it in the encouragement provided by those he encountered in the restrictive lock-up units in which he served time. This process began with his cellie from Bakersfield, and continued when he was validated as a gang associate and transferred to the Pelican Bay SHU. In his pod – or the eight solitary cells forming one unit within the SHU – he was fortunate to find another man who was instrumental in providing him the support to begin pursuing his education formally:

Even though they had a GED program [in the SHU], I didn't feel comfortable with the math and there wasn't really anyone there to help me, so I just didn't do it ... And it wasn't until a couple months later, or a year later, when homeboy drove up – when the white dude drove up ... And one day I heard him helping one of the homies with math. So I was like, “Can you help me out too?” So we started in 2006. And I took the GED in May of 2007, and then I started applying for college in the summer of 2007 for the fall of 2007.

Anthony had been incarcerated in a pod composed of those categorized as “Southern Hispanics,” but when a white man was assigned to a vacant cell – (i.e., he “drove up”) – the other prisoners embraced him as part of their community almost immediately. He never asked his family for packages or to add money to his prison account, and he was therefore ill-equipped in terms of the cosmetics and extra food that packages and trips to the prison canteen provide. While Anthony and the other “Southerners” in the pod provided him with toiletries and supplies, he participated in the collective economy by making wine and tutoring.

When I asked Anthony to clarify how it was that he and the other members of his pod were able to work with each other on homework, given the extremely restrictive conditions in the SHU, he responded:

I would always ask for two copies ... So I slide him a copy and he'll do it throughout the day, and then after chow, it would be like, “Hey you want to go over this?” So after chow we would take two hours to go over it. And I was in 104, and he was in 201, but at the top. So we would have to yell, though. But it worked, though. And then I would take the tests. And the math tests were what I was always worried about. But that was pretty cool, when I got my GED. Everybody was very supportive.

Each pod in the SHU houses eight cells, four on the bottom and four on the top. Anthony's tutor was incarcerated in the cell the farthest from Anthony's, one story up and at the opposite end of the series of four cells. By yelling to one another back and forth while Anthony made his way through the math problems, his tutor provided the support Anthony needed to master his fear of math and pass the test. And with the GED under his belt, Anthony decided to pursue college through a California community college, deciding on a certificate in business administration, an 18-unit program he would be able to complete if he completed one course per semester up until his release.

When the existing college programs operating in California's prisons were disbanded after the elimination of Pell Grant eligibility, some community colleges, seeking new ways of generating federal per-pupil income, began identifying the incarcerated population as a new source of students to whom they could provide services with little overhead. Given the unstable higher education budgets over the neoliberal era, and the simultaneously deep investments in prison budgets over the

same period, some community colleges identified incarcerated individuals as a population in need of educational services whose isolation made correspondence courses a natural fit (Mukamal et. al, 2015). These programs represent one of the complicated manifestations of neoliberal practice and policy to which Ferguson (2010) points.

For individuals like Anthony, confined within the most isolating and restrictive conditions within the prison system, the correspondence courses offered by these colleges represent a significant and meaningful opportunity to begin using time productively and acquiring college credits which they can build on upon release. At the same time, the meager support and services they provide can set up incarcerated students, many of whom have not been in school for years and have low levels of educational attainment, for frustration (Mukamal et. al., 2015).

Anthony was extremely fortunate, however, in that the support he received from his fellow pod members directly counteracted and addressed the potential flaws in the correspondence program system. As Anthony was about to initiate his enrollment in college, he was moved to a different pod, and was anxious about entering a new social environment in which the internal dynamics were unknown. However, he found that his new pod was “fucking cool” and he encountered another neighbor who would prove instrumental in inspiring him to aim for higher goals:

My neighbor is doing four college courses through Coastline, he’s doing a paralegal class through Blackstone, and he was drawing and playing chess. So I told him my plan, and he was like, “Fuck that shit. Get your AA, dude. Don’t settle.” And my thing was like, “I don’t got the money.” And he said, “I got all the books, don’t worry.” And dude was very instrumental – he was a very strong positive reinforcement.

This encouragement, plus the financial support through lending the textbooks, a cost that can be prohibitive for many incarcerated students, proved essential in Anthony choosing to pursue an Associate of Arts degree. His neighbor, who was farther along in his pursuit of the degree, also provided him with the tutoring he would have otherwise lacked:

So a lot of the classes I was already doing, he had already done them. So he had already taken classes that I’ve taken. And he was like, “Hey fool, I’m not going to give you the answers. I want you to do the work. Do the quizzes, send me the quizzes, I’ll mark them off, and then I’ll return them to you and you can figure out what you got wrong.” So I was a straight A student because I had that resource. He would check my papers, and just him doing that made me feel like I really know how to write.

Anthony’s neighbor not only encouraged him to reach higher than his original goal of the business certificate, but also provided the material resources that enabled Anthony to take the classes and the tutoring that supported him in his efforts to learn and circumvent the natural frustration that arises in approaching unfamiliar material, not by providing him with the answers, but by forcing him to learn for himself from his mistakes. The fact that the correspondence program provided the same course materials to all incarcerated students enrolling in those courses year after year enabled the materials to circulate within the prisons, which facilitated textbook sharing, but also resulted in cheating scandals when individuals without the disciplined support and tutoring that Anthony received simply copied the exams and worksheets already completed by students who took the courses previously. Anthony’s experience thus illuminates the importance of engaged support that holds individuals to high standards as they progress on their paths.

In describing this pivotal phase of his life, Anthony reflected:

The thing for me is that I find it difficult talking about the SHU, because people are like, “Oh shit – the SHU was good then!” Because it facilitated my path to education, right? But that wasn’t – I know that the SHU wasn’t set up for my success. It wasn’t set up to help me transition back to society ... But in spite of that, we were able to find ways to resist those conditions.

Through the mutual aid and engaged support Anthony experienced in his pods within the SHU, he was able to resist the conditions of neoliberal penalty and to swim upstream – to find ways to use his time productively and to attach to a different path than the prison-oriented one that had characterized his adolescence and early prison years. And after solidifying his position on this path, eventually transferring to a community college in his neighborhood and then gaining acceptance to UC Berkeley as a transfer student, Anthony began advocating for others in much the same way his neighbors in the SHU had done for him. He participated in protests in solidarity with the hunger-striking prisoners in the short corridor of the SHU, and he helped form a group on the UC Berkeley campus, called the Underground Scholars Initiative (USI), dedicated to supporting students with direct experience with the criminal justice system. He invited his younger brother, still living in Norwalk, to come live with him in student housing, and he is working on convincing his sister to go back to school, if not for herself, he says, then to set the example for her kids.

Anthony also mentioned how he and his cellie from Bakersfield, who was still incarcerated at the time of our interview, remained in contact. Anthony was now offering him encouragement and the same advice he received when first embarking on his college path – to not settle:

But he’s getting out in a few months. He has his AA, he has a plan, so I hooked him up with Project Rebound, and I hooked him up with a friend from Bakersfield who could take him to the community college down there. But his thing is that he wants to work on the oil fields down there because they take people with convictions. But I’m like, “No, don’t do that – that shit is unhealthy.”

Similarly to Anthony, Benjamin was disappointed in the options available to him for pursuing education or vocational training on the level 4 yards to which he was assigned, but he too eventually found a correspondence program, this one provided by a private college with a mission of outreach to marginalized student populations, which he was fortunate to have paid for by family.

It was in San Quentin’s reception center that Benjamin started to develop a vision for his future which involved confronting the one thing that he had been avoiding in his adult life so far: school. In recalling his adolescence, Benjamin reflected on the reputation he developed as a solid fighter: “I had a knack for hurting people. I was never real smart in school, so people would call me to do some stuff that they couldn’t do. You know, I’m not proud of it, but prestige comes in different ways.” When he graduated from high school and was working odd jobs, he recalls he was “doing everything I could to make it without ever having to deal with school, ‘cause I was afraid of that, and I had to really take a look at that.”

When Benjamin arrived in San Quentin’s Reception Center, he was demoralized by the environment he witnessed surrounding him:

When I finally got to prison – and it’s what everybody’s been talking about – and like thinking it’s got this reputation, and it’s so respected in some parts, unfortunately. And I’m like, “This is a waste of my time!” I’m like, “People are going back and forth to this thing and talking about it like it’s some kind of accomplishment?!”

As he assessed his situation, he reflected on his life circumstances leading to his current predicament:

I had to start looking at me, dealing with me. And I looked at all the stuff that led up to me being there, all the good stuff that had happened in my life, and then where I was at currently, and where do I see myself going. So I really said, I gotta make this shit count for me.

With the decision to “make this shit count,” Benjamin began researching the options available within the prison system for pursuing something that would enable him to use his time productively. However, given his age and the length of his sentence, which translated into his assignment to a level 4 yard, he found little inspiration:

I looked into what CDCR had, and I was disappointed with that. I was like, “Shit, I gotta do something beyond that.” They had a GED in this institution, and they had a vocational program. I’m like, “That’s cool.” I thought I could go to one that had eyeglass repair – I figured that could be a trade on the outside, but most of that is at low-level prisons – and I wasn’t going there.

He began researching options he could access while incarcerated offered by outside entities, and it was through starting these courses that Benjamin encountered something with which he genuinely connected, which was pivotal in securing him on the educational path:

You know what really helped me in that transformation was finding something in college that I could identify with. And that just happened to be Sociology. I never knew you could major in that! I thought college was like, scientific. You know, you had to look like Poindexter with the thick, thick glasses and the tight-ass pants [laughing]. Or, some cats that we had known had got a sports scholarship and went to school. But I honestly believed – I had to really realize that I honestly believed that everyone between those two – those two dimensions – was cut out of the game. But that wasn’t true! I just didn’t know ... And that just comes from misinformation or lack of being able to be in those circles ... I didn’t know a lot about school, I didn’t know anyone who had been there that I could talk to about it. So I had to learn all that stuff on my own.

The key to Benjamin’s attachment to the educational path, more so than simply deciding he wanted to make productive use of his time, occurred when he found a subject matter and approach to analyzing the world to which he felt a genuine connection. His lack of familiarity with higher education as a youth suggests that if he had been exposed, not only to the logistics of pursuing college but also the array of subject matter for students to explore, he may have attached to a college path much sooner. And like Anthony, when Benjamin was released from prison 10 years later, he continued pursuing his higher education at San Francisco State through Project Rebound, a support program founded in 1967 by Sociologist John Irwin operated for and by formerly incarcerated students. When Benjamin graduated, he began working as a staff member of Project Rebound, advocating for students like himself as they transitioned from prison to higher education. And when Anthony contacted him to ask for support in initiating the Underground Scholars, Anthony, Danny, and Sparky, who was also a student at UC Berkeley at the time, met to discuss how to make it happen.

In addition to correspondence courses, the “bastards” found formalized support for their journeys in some of the state-funded educational and vocational programs that were more available within the medium- and minimum-security prisons to which some of them were eventually transferred. As Raymond continued serving his 17-year sentence, he eventually moved down in points, and was transferred from High Desert to a level 2, medium-security yard at Solano, a prison known for housing a greater array of prison-funded and volunteer-operated programs. Raymond had served as a teaching assistant in the education classrooms in his last few years at High Desert, but at Solano, he was able to apply for positions in a new array of formalized opportunities providing credentials and on-site instruction. Eventually, he adopted the role of a leader and facilitator:

When I went to Solano, now you have voc[ational] and academic classes. You had college, you could do GED. College was on the side. When I found out that there was college, I got on that immediately ... But the staff person, he would always make sure I was signed up for everything. And I would speak if they had people coming in. And then I heard they had a program where they were going to train people as counselors. Because I was working with a program where they brought in the kids – and that’s why I went in [to the counseling program] – I thought that it would make me more effective with the kids. I didn’t care about alcohol and substance abuse – I didn’t think it related to me. But when I went in – I don’t know how many hundreds of people applied – but I made it because teachers who were influential made some calls for me.

As Raymond’s testimony illustrates, the wider array of programs available at Solano represented an exciting breath of fresh air, but those providing credentials and college credit were also extremely competitive and limited the populations eligible for participation. He recalled that the college courses offered were only open to those 25 and under, and he was therefore only accepted by a staff member lied about his age. And he made it into the highly selective counseling program again due to the intervention of a helpful staff member.

As Raymond began developing his skill sets, he became a leader in a program in which youth on probation or otherwise identified as “at risk” are brought into adult prisons in hopes that the experience will intervene in their path. These programs are notorious for adopting what is known as a “scared straight” approach, the idea that by offering a tour of a prison, and having prison veterans lecture youth about the dangers of prison life, much like the detective did for Sparky back in the Los Angeles county probation department, that they would be scared into conforming. Under the leadership of incarcerated facilitators with higher emotional intelligence and exposure to appropriate skills and training, however, these programs have also in some cases shifted in emphasis and approach over the years. When Raymond assumed a leadership position in this program, for example, he altered the curriculum to intervene in the relationships between parents and their kids, perhaps addressing issues in their lives that could have been addressed in his own:

I became vice chairman, and I rewrote their training manuals. And this time I put the counseling in there. So the training became different – we put in active listening, in talking to the kids. Where before, it was like the guys were just lecturing, like scared straight. And I got rid of the old guys that didn’t want to do things differently, so we became a new animal. Because the parents would come in with the kids, and we would do an intervention-type thing. Because everything that was a problem in their households was swept under the rug. So the kid would come in and we would talk to the kid after the tour, and there were all these things hurting the kid, and we would ask the kid if we could bring that stuff up with the parents, and 90 percent of the time they would say, “Yeah.” And it was amazing. They *do* want to talk about things, and they *do* want help. Sometimes that option is never really

opened, in a healthy forum, you know, where it's not about bashing each others' heads in. Because we used to get parents hella pissed off, when the kid would dare, you know, imply that they're not the perfect parent. But they didn't get it that your kids aren't saying you're a bad parent, it's just that it hurts him when you act a certain way. So using counseling skills, and any skill I could come up with, I would try to help them. So that's what the program became, is an intervention between a parent and a kid.

From the silence between Raymond and his father during his adolescence, to the interaction on the handball court with the "Southerner" who encouraged him to forgive his father, to the intervention he made in the youth program, he seemed to come full circle. No longer was he plotting to kill his father, rather he was helping parents and their children to communicate with one another, to intervene in the isolation and rejection that had helped facilitate his own path to incarceration.

Some prisons are also known for housing volunteer-run programs, which can also provide meaningful opportunities not only for self-reflection, but also for meeting criteria required for findings of suitability by the parole board, and for challenging the ideologies individuals may absorb within their racialized groups. It was nearly ten years into his sentence that Countryman began reflecting on his crime, learning more about himself, and letting go of some of the racist ideologies he had adopted while incarcerated on high security yards. Countryman was transferred to a level 3 yard at Donovan, a prison near San Diego, which, like Solano, is known for providing more opportunities to participate in vocational and therapeutic programs. On the level 4, super-maximum security yards at Folsom and Corcoran upon which he had been confined previously, Countryman had encountered white supremacist groups and had been influenced by the racist ideologies preached among the population of prisoners categorized as "White," entrenched through "house rules" built on racial contamination theory such as those prohibiting "Whites" from "rubbing sweat" on "Blacks."

When I asked Countryman how racist he had become in these environments, he explained: When I was at Folsom, it was so ingrained in me. My whole life I had never associated with blacks. Where I grew up in Southern Ohio, it was an all white school. We had a black family that moved in at one point, and so there were two black kids in my school. And I never really thought much about it ... And when I get to Folsom, and there are these racist guys with big tattoos, white supremacist groups and stuff like that, I got to the point – I got a TV Guide every week, I would take a razor blade and cut out all the pictures of the blacks, so I would have nothing but whites in my TV Guide ... So I got real heavy into it.

Once he arrived at Donovan, Countryman was convinced to start participating in the volunteer-run programs by older prisoners serving life sentences who encouraged him to remain hopeful that he would one day be released despite the explicit "no parole" policy implemented by the Governor at the time:

How it started was, I had these lifers tell me, if you want a chance to parole, you have to do vocations, you have to do AA and NA, you have to get involved in programs and be proactive in order to show 'em you're not just setting back on the yard and kicking it with the homies. You have to jump through the hoops in order to satisfy the board's requirements. And that's how it started. I didn't want to go to the programs – my hand was forced.

Countryman found, however, that once he started participating in the programs, that he enjoyed them, and learned useful things about himself and useful tools for dealing with his environment:

I started going to the programs, like NA and AA, and Hand of Peace, an alternatives to violence program, where you'd sit in the chapel for three days, and people would come in from the outside, volunteers. And you'd have different activities, and group sessions, and you'd sit down and talk about different examples of how you could be an active listener instead of jumping to conclusions and attacking people, how you could talk your way out of trouble instead of raising your fist in violence, how can you avoid a situation like that, or calm the other guy down, whether it's through humor, or talking the other guy down. It was, just a, like, tools for your toolbox. How you can defuse situations, not only between yourself and somebody else, but also if you see your friends in a situation, how can you defuse it without violence being involved.

And given the fact that programs are by law inter-racial spaces, these opportunities to participate also meant that Countryman was sharing stories and having conversations with individuals across the dividing lines he had internalized in other prison contexts:

But when you're in groups like that, you get to interact with other people, other races ... and I would get into real deep, personal conversations with them. And I realized, they're just people, and they care about their kids and want the best for them, and they're just trying to get through this, just like I am ... and you learn, some of the same experiences I had growing up he had too, and you find a common bond, and that develops the relationship. And it seems like some of the people you go to one program with, you go to the next program with. So you get to know each other, and you start to see each other as people, human beings, as fathers and sons and husbands – comrades, you see 'em as friends ... So that was a huge ... In level 4s they don't have that, and it's just *racist, racist*, and you have to abide by it.

As Countryman settled into the programming environment, he adopted a different orientation towards his incarceration and the people around him, and began proactively seeking new opportunities to learn, eventually adopting leadership positions with certain groups:

So by starting the programs for the board, I started being able to communicate with people, my social skills picked up, I started learning a bit about myself ... It's no longer about, "Oh, I have to go to these programs for the board," it's like, "I got these tools, and I like tools! I want *more* tools, and more friendships, I want to learn more about myself." It was no longer about secluding – being a hermit in my cell – but about interacting with people. So I started seeking out programs to be an active participant.

Conclusion: Resisting Neoliberal Penalty

Correspondence courses, state-run rehabilitative programs, and the efforts of prison volunteers supported the "bastards'" private efforts to connect to new ideas and pathways, helping them stabilize in their newfound orientation. Through the support, encouragement, and advice they provided to one another, they found ways of mitigating the dislocation and isolation imposed by neoliberal strategies of control. The connections some were able to form across racialized divisions

also challenged the stagnant ideologies circulating within racialized groups, offering new forms of intimacy and exploration prohibited in other venues given the institutional racialization process. And the opportunities to participate in state-funded or volunteer-run programming provided those serving life sentences with a means of meeting parole board requirements, mitigating to a small degree the hopelessness created by the “no parole” policy and the imposition of extremely long sentences. As such, the formalized support for individual reconnection served as a limited but significant means of resisting the conditions otherwise characterizing neoliberal penalty.

When Countryman was transferred to San Quentin in 2005, he was amazed by the freedom of movement, the tolerance among the racialized groups, the level of programs available, and the masses of volunteers who came in on a daily basis to interact with the incarcerated population. In San Quentin, the high level of programming and the high level of work incarcerated individuals put into maintaining the programs and encouraging one another to embrace them has translated into a carceral environment in which resistance to the conditions of neoliberal penalty has become mainstream.

CHAPTER NINE: *Turning the Yard*

The San Quentin mainline is unique precisely because of how permeable its walls have become in the past two decades, opening the society inside to the broader debates and dialogues occurring in society outside of the prison, and as such, challenging the cultural and intellectual stagnation that has occurred inside given highly controlled access to information.

In 1996, San Quentin became the only prison in California to offer on-site, credit-bearing college courses. Just as Pell Grant funding was eliminated, a professor in the Religious Studies department at UC Davis approached the president of Patten University, a small, Christian college in Oakland, California that had been offering religiously-based certificates and degrees in a few different prisons across the state. She convinced the college president to allow her to spearhead a program that would offer a liberal arts degree, suggesting they implement the program regardless of the lack of federal funding by recruiting volunteer faculty from local Bay Area colleges and universities and requesting the donation of books and supplies.

When Elizabeth Lombardi became warden of San Quentin, the College Program was in its third year of existence, as was a volunteer-run GED program, and several other programs like Toast Masters, creative writing, AA, and NA. When I asked her whether she had been excited to take the position, she replied:

I did have a vision. I really wanted to expand programs, and bring in more volunteers. And I really understood San Quentin. And I really thought I understood public safety in a broader sense and I realized that we were paroling a lot of people every week who we had done nothing for. Nothing. And that we had no resources to do anything for them. And it really worried me and bothered me ... So I really kind of knew I couldn't do much scientific stuff – evidence based programs in San Quentin. But I wanted to bring down the idleness. So bring in as many programs as I could. Because I knew that busy people stay out of trouble. And I wanted the prison not to be locked down. I hated lockdowns.

As more incarcerated people started participating in GED and college courses, volunteers recruited their colleagues and friends to begin working inside, and Lombardi ensured that prison staff engaged in the bureaucratic processes necessary to oversee the expansion of the programs, more and more opportunities for self-development and training became available inside San Quentin. By the mid-2000s, an average of over 4,000 volunteers were granted security clearance to enter San Quentin annually, and over 70 programs operated by volunteers or incarcerated individuals were available inside.⁴

In this sense, San Quentin organically developed into a neoliberal rehabilitative configuration in which staff of volunteer-run programs is granted the status of contracted employees and the majority of rehabilitative services are delivered through a kind of public-private partnership model. While the broader political and economic policies within California since the late 1970s have divested from higher education and social services while investing in law enforcement and prisons, these public-private partnerships – in which the historical state project of rehabilitating prisoners is farmed out to non-profit organizations and other private and grassroots entities – when they operate to reduce the return of individuals to prison, to connect them with stable and meaningful employment, to reunite with family in healthy ways, and to connect to higher education, can

⁴ According to San Quentin's Community Relations Manager, August 3, 2012.

produce outcomes countering the broader neoliberal trends of increasing income inequality, and increasing criminalization and incarceration.

For those incarcerated on San Quentin's mainline, many of whom are lifers serving indeterminate sentences, participation in these programs offers a means of meeting the parole board's suitability requirements. They also offer means of making connections with people from outside the prison, as well as the opportunity to process pent up emotions, to reflect on their lives, to participate in healthy forms of self-expression through the arts and education, and to gain marketable skills and credentials. The community that forms as individuals pursue these avenues for connection offers a stark contrast to the divisions, the boredom, the violence, and the conformity characterizing other neoliberal prison yards.

In recalling his first experience teaching mathematics inside San Quentin in the late 1990s, Simon, a long-term volunteer faculty member of the College Program, recalled how he purposefully challenged the racial segregation he noted in the classroom:

On the third class that I went to, I told them – everything was going fine on class vibe except for one thing – and I brought it up. I said, “Next time I want you guys to mix a little bit. It’s segregated in here and that’s not how it is on the outside and I don’t like it.” And that’s all I said. Now I heard later from one of the people I had been tutoring that there had been a big discussion about that, and there had to be a big negotiation to make that happen.

Because Simon was one of the first teachers for the College Program, his requirement that students work together across these lines created a challenge to the dominant rules. And though the racialized divisions imposed throughout the California prison system also exist within San Quentin and are a source of conflict and tension at times, the programs created a space enabling norms to develop through ongoing challenges and negotiation. The sharing of new ideas and perspectives that occurs in these spaces assists in diversifying and pluralizing the conversation and political ideologies circulating within the prison, offering a venue for developing and sharing individual perspectives and gaining a different vantage point on ones past, future, and current predicament.

Given the crossing of racialized lines, the introduction of updated political ideas, and the forums for discussion, new conversations begin to take place that layer upon and challenge the ideologies underlying prison politics. Lance, a volunteer history instructor, described how hungry his students at San Quentin were for these new perspectives and ideas, as well as the pathways they offered. He described how the students approached their work with a discipline he found refreshing and almost comic compared to the students he was accustomed to encountering in elite university settings. Lance began his work at San Quentin as a tutor in a study hall run by the College Program. He recalled a student who was taking a Sociology course at the time approaching him to discuss the theories he was studying:

He was doing really high-level stuff, and he was doing it well. But it was totally different than how my students at Berkeley were doing it. It was more combative. But there was no joy in it. But it was incredibly serious. So we had some really good conversations about Durkheim. And they felt very substantive and we were connecting well. But it was interesting how – just how focused he was. And it makes sense, because for undergrads they’re doing what they’re supposed to do, and sometimes they get really into it, but there’s not a sense of really serious self-cultivation of the kind I associate with someone living in New England in the 17th century. You’re doing something difficult because you think that

it's important. And whether you like it or not is irrelevant. You weren't doing it because someone ordered you to do it; you were doing it because it made you a better person.

Lance later taught US History for several semesters, and when I asked him whether any race-related issues emerged in the classroom, he described how student excitement regarding aspects of the curriculum would sometimes “break down along racial lines.” He continued:

Some of the white students would be very much, kind of, strong white working class identity. A lot of resentment against the cluster of – opening up white workspaces to African American workers while the economy was torching in the 1970s. There were people who lived through that and it might have been part of their pathway to prison. The politics of the 70s and 80s were so alive in the classroom! Because a lot of people went in then. There were a lot of old guys whose political formation happened outside of the prison – and then got amplified and flash-frozen when they came in the prison and interacted with the racial politics inside.

The intellectual stagnation Lance describes made for interesting classroom discussions, and the challenges to these perspectives enabled, at least in some cases, evolution in thinking and relating with impacts beyond the classrooms.

Henry, for example, described a process he underwent in the context of a Critical Thinking course offered by the College Program, in which he shifted his perspective on sexual preference, disentangling his conflation of sexual predation with homosexuality. Henry was transferred to San Quentin in 2002 after serving eight years within Corcoran. At Corcoran, Henry had been warned that level 2 yards, like San Quentin's mainline, were for “lames” – “all the people who couldn't handle the real yard.” Though he was originally classified to level 2 points in the year 2000, he chose to override this classification, remaining on the level 3 yard at Corcoran for two additional years. In exaggerated bravado, Henry explained: “Because I'm a down-ass motherfucker. 'Cause I'm a rider. About the business.”

The story emerged when he began describing in more detail the rapes that he witnessed in the cellblock in which he was first incarcerated at Corcoran:

This really cemented my, I guess, my belief that all gay people are rapists, because one night, I was just kicking back watching my cellie's TV or something like that, and I started hearing pounding: “Boom boom boom, help me, help me! My cellie's raping me! My cellie's raping me!” ... And about a half hour later they come in. And he was done raped already, and beaten. They arrest the guy, take him out, and at that moment, that's when I said, “No. I'm killing a homosexual, or I'm dying before anything happens.” And that was cemented. Now was I prepared to kill that person? Yes. I know that for a fact. And it happened three more times while I was in that building. Not with the same guy – just all over the place ...

So anytime I came across a homosexual, it was just, I'd lay it down for 'em ... I would just say, “Look. Just so you have an understanding. I've never craved a cock in my life, I'm not craving cock now, and I'm not gonna crave a cock. Just so we have an understanding. So now that you understand where I'm coming from - and I'm not one of those cats that say, ‘Oh I might like it.’ No, I *know* I'm not gonna like it. So, from this day forward, any kind of move or anything like that towards me, I'm taking as a sexual threat from you.”

In his Critical Thinking class at San Quentin, however, the instructors offered Henry a challenge:

For my final, they said – you had choices of what to do. And it was something about pro-gay, no, anti-gay marriage. And that was one of the choices. And she said, “Why don’t you just do this?” ... And I’m like, “Pshhh. I could do that with my eyes closed.” She said, “*For* it, though.” I’m like, “What?” “Can you handle it?” ... ‘Cause I’d already made some speech about how if somebody raped my niece or something like that, I’d kill them. And they’re like, “Uh...” And I said all kinds of stuff... But, so I wrote that paper, and I had to do all kinds of stuff for it. And I made it – it was a great paper – I took mythology and religion, law, and everything to make it like where it would be legal for them to marry ... So – but it was awesome – it tied all together. So anyways, from that, that’s when I was like, they’re just people. They’re not all rapists, they’re not all – they’re just trying to find love like everybody else. And the people that were in *there* – *they* were rapists. Right?

While Henry’s perspectives evolved given the intellectual challenge he was presented in the classroom, Watani Stiner, an older political prisoner, pointed to how listening to others’ stories in group settings, when many individuals on the mainline are involved, can shift the entire social and political environment in the cellblock and on the yard:

A lot of times it’s hard to be angry at somebody if you know their story, and in a lot of these groups you’re able to tell your story, so you know more about the person, whereas in these other institutions, prisons, you don’t know their story, you just know that it’s a black and white line, it’s a line that’s drawn and you can’t cross that line. So the rules are already established. But when you come into an environment where you have this dialogue, whether you want to or not, once you get involved then just hearing somebody else’s story you can either identify with it, say, “Okay, I went through that same issue,” you know, because you hear a lot of different things. So that sort of breaks the barrier and people start forming different kind of relationships, at a whole different level that was unheard of at other institutions, you know.

The process of “turning the yard,” as one man put it, or of allowing the pursuit of self-development to become mainstream within the San Quentin mainline, involved proactively intervening in the conflicts and tensions that could erupt into violence and stoke the underlying divisions of prison politics. The knowledge incarcerated individuals gained about each other through hearing each others’ stories enabled them to understand the motivations behind each others’ actions on deeper levels, and provided the motivation to intervene in potentially explosive situations they might otherwise ignore.

Henry recalled a moment of rising tension between a white and Native American prisoner in which he intervened because of the relationships that he had formed across the usual dividing lines:

They’re yelling, they’re like this [using hands to indicate being face to face] and I’m like, “I better go out there.” And I get out there and I’m like, “Tim, what’s wrong with you, dude?” And then, you know, he’s like, “Blacks can’t sit at this table!” I said, “Three weeks ago you didn’t give a damn, but now you get denied [by the parole board], and you want to push that ‘no blacks can sit at this table’ – it’s not even your table!” And he’s like, “It’s a Native American table, and you guys need to police it!” “Well, when you’re Native American, you can tell me how to police this table.” And it goes on and on and I’m like, “Look, personally I could care less about the table, it’s been years since I was willing to kill and die for a table. I don’t care about this table, I don’t think any of the Native Americans care about this table, so if you want to police this table, by all means, we’re going to let you police that table.”

Because Henry was aware of what was going on in Tim's private life – the fact that he had been denied parole by the board three weeks before – he also knew that Tim was stirring something up for other reasons than it seemed. And because he had formed friendships with people across racial lines, he was more willing to intervene because he did not want to be put in a situation where he might have to fight people with whom he studied and had formed friendships. Though at first he reminded Tim that it was not his right to police a table that “belonged” to the Native Americans, he was also willing to let Tim's need for control over something slide.

Some described the political dynamic within San Quentin as one in which the division between “programmers” and “non-programmers” was primary, as opposed to the division between the various racialized groups, representing a primary challenge to the political structures and institutional racialization otherwise characterizing confinement across the California prison system. Aaron Williams, another man I interviewed who provided stability to the programming community within San Quentin, argued, “the programmers pretty much control everything but the chow hall tables and the tables on the yard.” In trying to understand this coexistence between the “programmers” and the political community in more depth, I then asked about how those who participate in programs might benefit from the presence of the political leaders, to which Aaron explained:

In some cases they get a stamp of approval in the larger system-wide gang ... So if they go somewhere else they'll still get a stamp of approval from San Quentin, like, “He's okay, he still took care of business.”

Given the paperwork policy, people within San Quentin who “program” must ensure they remain in “good standing” with the leadership of the group into which they are categorized such that if they happen to be transferred to a different prison yard, they do not have to fear being “removed.” Moreover, the political leaders may have more authority with certain prisoners who cause problems within the programs, and can thus be effective in enforcing rules that maintain program stability:

But also the shot callers are big on respect and doing things orderly, so if someone does something dangerous, like that could start a riot – and if they won't listen to a programmer, they will listen to a shot caller ... So right before I left, some youngster jumped the fence into the education building and broke into the lockers and stole notebooks and was trying to sell them that night. So the programmers were trying to collect the notebooks and get them back, but he was a youngster and he wasn't trying to hear that, and so they went to the shot callers and said, “You need to deal with this.” And that kid never did it again. So it *is* helpful for the programmers to have those guys around.

Aaron also mentioned the fact that the two groups – programmers and non-programmers – were neither mutually exclusive nor black and white categories. Some go through “a transitional phase,” and some who program “are right on the edge, and all they need is a little cue to do something they're not supposed to do.” In summing up this description, Aaron described the work that many of the incarcerated men across categories and groups put in to maintaining stability within San Quentin:

There were a lot of people who played multiple roles in keeping the stability inside San Quentin. And not just the political stability in terms of who sits where and riots and stuff, but the programming stability, which adds another layer of stability.

In a conversation with Hector and Paul, two men who graduated from the College Program and held leadership positions in numerous other self-development programs during their incarceration at San Quentin, they told numerous stories that illuminated their ability to maintain a certain level of independence from the pressure to conform to the rules surrounding inter-group mixing. Hector and Paul felt particularly fortunate to work in a vocational shop in which the workforce was dominated by incarcerated men who embraced the programming culture and participated in the College Program. Paul described how the programs, particularly the College Program, provided a kind of “refuge from the madness” – the bullshit of “the building,” meaning the cellblock, in that it offered something to talk and think about other than the gossip and territorialism that could otherwise monopolize peoples’ attention.

Another highlight of working in the shop that Hector and Paul mentioned was the spreads, essentially prison potlucks, they put together:

[
Miguel] built an oven in the back. We’d make these burritos, we’d fry them up, and then we’d bake them up. And they came out great. And sometimes we’d make 50 of these. There’s 20 or 30 guys in the shop and everybody knows it’s burrito day. And one guy would bring one thing, and another would bring something else. So it’s fair game – everyone can participate. So as long as you bring something, but me and Hector would make it.

When I asked why Paul, categorized as “White,” and Hector, categorized as “Northern Mexican,” were able to cook and eat food together given the rigid rules around not “eating after” people across group categories enforced on other prison mainlines, they provided another window into the ways that typical “prison politics” could be challenged and resisted. Because Hector was considered at the top of hierarchy of physical strength, he was able to use this to encourage others to participate in programs rather than to enforce rules or engage in violence.

Hector was well reputed within the San Quentin mainline because, as Dante Maldonado put it, he was “both mentally and physically strong.” I had known that Hector was a jailhouse lawyer, constantly filing cases on his own and other incarcerated individuals’ behalf, and at times requiring they start participating in educational programming in exchange for his legal services. Hector also insisted on “standing alone,” and developed a reputation as a skilled fighter, leading to his repeated testing, often by “youngsters” interested in making a name for themselves.

In describing why he and Hector did not overly concern themselves with their reputations given how openly they resisted the rules around inter-group mixing, Paul described the fact that few would be interested in challenging Hector, and the ones that did ended up with their “heads in a toilet:”

It was great, because you got these youngsters, especially those ones who are in the hole? Those dudes come out and they’ve been doing 1000 burpees a day and they have this soldier mentality, so they want to take on the toughest guy on the yard. And Hector was often the one who would be that guy. And what was the one dude’s name – the big dude? [He] is this humongous guy, he’s just a monster, and he wanted to try.

Hector: Yeah, he came into my cell and said, “I want to try you.” And I’m like, “Really?” So I just grab him and pull him in and then [another prisoner] rushes into the cell and starts helping me! And I stopped because I can’t do it with help, because then he’s going to say that we *both* put his head in the toilet. So I stopped. But after that, [the big dude] loved me.

By using his strength to maintain dominance, but not to harm anyone, Hector provided a stabilizing force on the yard. Dante Maldonado mentioned how Hector was like a father figure to him while he was inside, and I mentioned in response how I had heard about Hector's reputation for putting heads in toilets. He responded:

Yes! Yes! Cuz he was so strong, but he covered himself up so you wouldn't know. And there were people of good size, and if they didn't listen, he'd say, "Don't make me put your head in the toilet! Tell me I can't put your head in the toilet!" Those are real stories!

It's a way of building respect. Those toilets in there are super clean. You could eat out of them. If you drop your orange in there, you can pick it back up – it's totally clean. They keep them very clean. And Hector is a very clean person. His house is immaculate – or, his cell.

Hector's choice of tactic, to win a physical fight without seriously harming or degrading those who challenged him, demonstrates a form of working within the system in which physical strength determines the pecking order while utilizing his role at the top to influence those around him to attach to a different path and a different means of seeking respect and finding self-worth.

In describing why he was such a staunch advocate for education while he was incarcerated, Hector described his experiences of witnessing the individuals around him develop self-confidence as they began to improve their performance as students. He began by describing the different kind of friendships that he developed at San Quentin compared to the other prisons in which he was incarcerated previously, made possible by the "different reality" he encountered on San Quentin's mainline:

We're trying to protect each other in the prisons that have a lot of violence, North and South, but in San Quentin, we're still aware of the violence, but we're trying to help somebody out with a paper. It's different. Something happens there. It's not - "Hey Hec, I need you to – we're going to get down with the Surenos today." You don't hear that. You hear, "Damn, I'm having a problem with this damn paper. I don't know how to get it started." "Well let's talk about this paper and how to get it started."

And then you see a guy – this used to get me all the time – you see a guy can't write worth nothing. And he's beating the crap out of himself. "I can't do this, I can't do this." "Man, just do it. Turn it in, get a D. Don't cry about it. They'll tell you why, and then you build on it." And I seen it time after time. They get a D, or even an F, a marked up paper, and they tell him what he did wrong. And the guy's willing to listen, and he writes a better paper. The D turns into a C, the C into a B, and when they get an A, I swear, all their eyes get choked – their eyes start tearing up. "I got an A," you know? It's like, they never got an A before, you know. No one ever said, "I'm proud of you." "I knew you could do it! I *knew* you could do it. You're smarter than you think you are, you just don't know how to put it down on paper."

...But what makes San Quentin unique is that they never had a voice. Their voice was their hands, or selling drugs, that's how they earned money, and they learned that from somewhere, and now they're learning something else.

The San Quentin mainline is maintained through the work of countless individuals, volunteers, incarcerated individuals, and prison staff, alike, who work urgently to maintain the opportunities for growth and exploration for which incarcerated people, otherwise accustomed to the stifling conditions of confinement under neoliberal penalty, hunger.

In Henry's personal experience, it was participation in multiple programs of different sorts that enabled him to gain valuable perspectives, to work on himself and shape himself into someone who he truly wanted to be, and to find a path. After six years at San Quentin, Henry had earned an Associate of Arts degree and completed the additional courses required for transfer eligibility as a junior to the Cal State University system; he began tutoring in a GED program; he participated in a Non Violent Communication group in which he "felt really safe;" and he revised his orientation toward forgiveness, to name a few of the moments he mentioned as powerful and pivotal in the process he undertook to self-reflect and change the direction of his life.

In the midst of this process, Henry came face to face with the promise he had made himself when he was first incarcerated – that he simply would not do 20 years in prison. Henry had started appealing his conviction when he was first confined, clear that he needed to exhaust all of this options for release before implementing his plan of "suicide by cop." And in 2006, the US Supreme Court refused to hear his appeal. Henry recalled:

I got this paper the night before, and I'm like, "This is it!" But by that time, I was taking class and all that stuff, so ... I'm just like, "Well, I don't think I want to do this anymore. Because I kind of like it here." But I made a promise to myself – I don't break promises! So I sat there, like, "This is it. I'm really gonna die in prison now." So I cried, and I cried all day. I prayed and I prayed, and I said, "Creator, I need some guidance. I need something, anything ... I need something to say that I'm not supposed to do that, because I'm on a new path now. My new path is to finish school and do all this stuff, and change, and get out of prison one day and all that stuff. I don't want to do that anymore, so I need something to tell me I'm on the right path."

And then I went back, and it was hard not to cry in the cell, but I didn't want my bunkie to see me ... And about midday, while I was sitting there, I hear, "Trust the spirits." In a woman's voice. I'm like, and the tears kinda like stopped, and I heard, "Trust the spirits." And, I said, "What?" And they said, "Trust the spirits." And I said, "I can trust the spirits. I've trusted the spirits so far." And uh, so I dried up, and I just started saying, "Trust the spirits." I've walked with the spirits, they've always walked with me, even when I didn't even realize it, so I was like, "Yeah, I can do that." And I was like, that's a sign, so I said, "Thank you, Creator."

In the context of the variety of educational and therapeutic programs in which Henry participated at San Quentin, he reconnected to a path, to the Creator, and to a healthy relationship to himself. After this experience, what Henry referred to as a "huge, huge day" in his life, he reflected that from then on, he accepted his incarceration, and decided that while he was there, he was going to enjoy being himself.

Within the context of San Quentin's informal public-private partnership model of rehabilitation, within a broader system of neoliberal penalty entrenching dislocation, isolation, and conformity, Henry found a way to be at peace with himself and his environment.

Conclusion: Generativity through Maturation and Connection

The "generative" orientation many of the "bastards" adopted as they forged connections to self, others, and meaningful paths is a clear pattern across their experience. Erikson (1993) associates the development of "generativity" with the onset of middle-adulthood, which is also a phase of life associated with desistance from crime. While males ages 17 to 24 are the demographic group most at-risk of criminality and violence by far, once they reach middle-adulthood, even those

with the most serious and persistent delinquent histories begin to desist (Sampson & Laub, 2003). The “bastards” testimonies also suggest, however, that the experiences of connection and intimacy that were pivotal in their adoption of a new orientation towards themselves and others played a fundamental role in their adoption of a generative orientation. Once they experienced a moment of radical honesty; or another person offered them meaningful advice, support, and encouragement; or they connected with literature or an academic subject and a newfound ability to interpret the world; and once they stabilized on the new path that this experience opened up, they became highly interested in creating a similar experience for others whose experiences of dislocation and criminalization resonated with their own. Accordingly, the individuals who have committed some of the most extreme and destructive acts of violence, when reconnected to themselves and to a healthy and meaningful path, can serve as potent advocates for the vulnerable and change agents in the community.

CONCLUSION: Looking Forward

Ours is a violent nation. From the philosophical underpinnings of the nation state, to the history of colonial genocide and displacement, to slavery, to foreign policy, to high rates of gun violence, to our policies of mass criminalization, violence is deeply embedded in our national fabric. Despite our national identification and entanglement with violence, however, the national conversation around violence is demoralizingly superficial. We are fascinated by violence, obsessed with watching it on our televisions and video games. We decry gun violence in the wake of mass shootings, but focus exclusively on gun control to address it. We consistently resort to calls for more law enforcement as the obvious solution to interpersonal violent crime in our neighborhoods and homes.

Turning to those who have experienced and committed violence on the deepest levels, we develop a more sophisticated understanding of the conditions leading to violence and a greater compassion for those who commit it. The lives of the “bastards” illustrate that violent acts are committed in violent contexts, and that our institutions of criminal justice contribute to the violence in our communities, rather than simply preventing or punishing it. We learn that the prison system is a context of extreme oppression and violence, and should be a site of focus for anyone interested in human rights violations, including sexual abuse and state sponsored torture.

We also learn that the sense of being lost – fundamentally disconnected from family, community, self, and purpose – is essential to understanding the roots of violence. And on the flipside, that forging meaningful, engaged relationships with others and with self can be an antidote to violence. We learn that opportunities for growth and reflection as well as changes to context can effectively intervene in an individual’s likelihood of committing a violent act. And, we learn that rehabilitation, rather than tinkering with an individual’s soul, or a paternalistic “helping” of vulnerable people, is rather about challenging individuals by holding them to high standards and exposing them to new perspectives and ideas.

Concretely, the lives of the “bastards” and the contexts through which they pass suggest a few essential and practical avenues for action:

First and foremost is sentencing policy. The extremely long sentences imposed on individuals under current policy is counterproductive and unjust, and contributes to hopelessness and violence within the prison system. The fact that individuals are offered few means by which to earn time off of these sentences also contributes to the destructive pathways young people with little hope of returning to the community can be tempted to follow as they enter the prison system. The complicated ways in which mandatory minimums, the three strikes law, and truth in sentencing legislation compound on one another is beyond the purview of this dissertation, but urgently needs to be addressed and brought into proportion with international standards.

Second, the work of providing meaningful opportunities for incarcerated individuals through high quality educational, artistic, therapeutic, and vocational programs is also essential for ensuring that these individuals have a shot at finding stability in the community upon their release, rather than returning to prison or living marginal lives in degrading conditions. The public-private partnership model San Quentin represents can work so long as the program coordinators maintain a critical position aimed at dismantling mass incarceration and addressing the overwhelming human rights abuses and social justice concerns occurring with prisons, jails and other carceral contexts. If the organizations operating inside these contexts maintain a critical awareness, authority over the content of their programs, and a stubborn refusal to accept the categories, discourses, and demands that the prison bureaucracy will relentlessly send their way, they can achieve meaningful social change within carceral spaces.

The existence of high quality programs can begin to change the conversation around punishment and mass incarceration and lead to the development of unlikely partnerships and dialogue. The CCPOA, for example, the powerful union representing California's correctional officers, has lobbied against the provision of state-funded educational programs in California prisons given the sense of some members that these programs are a waste of tax payers' money. But when the CCPOA leadership met with the director of the San Quentin College Program, and witnessed the vibrant and engaging classroom discussions, they offered to fund the program. Though the director refused this offer on political grounds, it opened up an ongoing conversation about how to address the failures of the system that have influenced the public discourse on punishment offered by the union leadership. Political Scientist Amy Lerman, who, inspired by her volunteer work in the San Quentin College Program, conducted a survey of correctional officer attitudes in California for her graduate dissertation, found that across the California prison system, officers were generally opposed to higher education for prisoners, with one exception: those who worked inside San Quentin.⁵

At the same time, for prisons sited outside resource- and population-rich urban hubs – in other words – for most of the prisons in California, achieving the level of programming available in San Quentin, or even in Solano or Donovan, is a near impossibility. Moreover, any large-scale state-funded project working within the criminal justice system, even if it is operated by an independent non-profit organization, will become a project of reform perpetuating the system rather than dismantling it.

Thus, third, we must support the work that is being done by the “bastards” which occurs outside the criminal justice system and firmly disavows partnerships with criminal justice and law enforcement agencies. The Office of Neighborhood Safety staff, for example, refuses to share information or maintain contact of any sort with law enforcement, enabling them not only to maintain credibility with the people they are intending to serve, but also to generate much-needed new ideas and conversations about what it looks like to prevent violence. When Sam and his colleagues first approach a young person active in violence, for example, they do not immediately ask that the youth put down his weapon, knowing that doing so given the active target on his back would feel like a death sentence. Instead, they ask the youth to “stop hunting” – to refrain from going on missions in enemy territory. They find that several months down the line, when the youth is no longer a “hot” target, he is more willing to consider laying down his gun because it has become a liability. Given the possibility of a new and meaningful direction the ONS staff have offered him, the fact that the gun is an immediate cause for criminalization and incarceration if he is stopped by police makes the risks of carrying it outweigh the costs. Through this and other strategies grounded in unflinching and non-judgmental acknowledgement of the realities of street life, young men law enforcement considers the most active threats to public safety become “peacemakers” in their communities.

In Anthony and Sparky's work with the Underground Scholars Initiative and Benjamin's work with Project Rebound, students at colleges and universities, with the support of those around them who also have histories of incarceration, begin “coming out,” revealing their histories knowing they will experience a backlash but also knowing that this backlash is worth no longer hiding crucial elements of their identities and experiences. They encourage one another to develop their voices, and to use those voices to speak openly and honestly about who they are and where they come from. They become leaders on campus, hosting events to raise awareness about long-term solitary confinement, the school-to-prison pipeline, and the massive deportations of immigrants. They attend events and community forums where they are able to push back against the language and the

⁵ Personal correspondence.

policies that continue the criminalization of their communities, and they offer distinct perspectives and alternative solutions. Just as those who came before them advocated for them, they use the resources they are accessing to advocate for those coming after them.

It is in these sites, focused on self-determination and collectivism, that the imaginative work necessary to develop alternatives to punishment and incarceration will take place.

On a final note, Sam and his colleagues at the Office of Neighborhood Safety often come back to an essential piece of the work that they do on a daily basis to prevent violence – teaching the dislocated youth they work with how to mourn the loss of a loved one without retaliating. They work with youth to disentangle the deeply entrenched connection between the grief, anger, and helplessness that arise at the violent death of a loved one from the urge for vengeance. If the peace-making fellows, one day at a time, are retraining themselves in this regard, we should be looking to them as leaders and for inspiration as we grapple with the fundamental questions of punishment, accountability, and social justice that we must confront in order to dismantle mass incarceration and build a healthy world.

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