

**Who are we when we go inside?:
48 hours in the New York City justice system**

ACADEMIC METHOD DOCUMENT

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Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts by Coursework and Research Report in the Department of Journalism, in the Faculty of Humanities, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

Micaeli Catherine Rourke

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Abstract

The Rikers Island Correctional Complex is as mysterious to American culture-at-large as it is notorious. “For viewers of *Law and Order*,” writes journalist Kaitlin Menza in *New York Magazine*, “Rikers is synonymous with 'worst place someone can be.' For criminal-justice advocates, it's a microcosm of everything wrong with the American prison system” (Menza, 2017). Spanning 167 hectares of land in the East River between the boroughs of Queens and the Bronx, the island is home to one of the world’s largest prison complexes (Alexander, 2017), and the second largest jail in the United States (Bogan, 2019).

This was about all I knew about Rikers Island for most of my life. Admittedly, I spent two years living within three kilometers from the island and was wholly unaware of its proximity the entire time.

In October of 2016, as I returned to America from South Africa for a short visit home, I was stopped at Immigration Control upon landing at JFK International Airport in New York City.

A missed court appearance had resulted in a bench warrant for my arrest in my native state of Pennsylvania. It had been issued while I was abroad, over 7 months prior. I was subsequently arrested at the airport, arraigned, and remanded without bail to the Rose M. Singer Female Correctional Facility on Rikers Island. I was sentenced to spend the next fourteen days as a “fugitive from justice” detainee, awaiting out-of-state extradition.

During that period of time I attempted to maintain a sense of purpose and perspective by documenting as many of the aspects of life inside the jail that I encountered there, as if it were a journalistic assignment similar to Nellie Bly’s groundbreaking work of American immersion journalism “10 Days in a Madhouse.”

This longform narrative seeks to document and contextualize my personal experience within the New York City Department of Correction for the very first time.

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Journalistic Aim

“At the high point of the bridge, the view is surreal. From behind, the dazzling Manhattan skyline beckons like the Land of Oz. Whitecaps ripple the expanse of the water below. Ahead sprawls a massive, low-lying detention complex ringed by coils of razor wire and lethal electric fence.”

-Jennifer Wynn, Inside Rikers

The intent of this narrative is to share my experience of being an inmate at Rikers Island, as well as the immediate events that preceded and followed my arrest. Since this is the first time I am sharing this story publicly, it is important to highlight my intention to make the piece a work of literary journalism, rather than strictly memoir. When considering the particularly thin line between the two genres, and evaluating where my piece should fall on that spectrum, I kept asking myself, “But why is this journalism?” I realize in hindsight that I was overlooking the answer.

This became a journalistic piece to me before I even set foot in Rikers. I began feverishly documenting my experience before I even left the communal holding room at the airport. I compulsively filled 18 pages in my journal with observational, stream of consciousness reporting, until that journal was confiscated with the rest of my belongings, prior to my transfer to the Port Authority police precinct. As if this were an innate coping mechanism, I made the intentional decision to treat my situation as a journalistic assignment, for what were at the time dual motivations of self-preservation and a continued sense of purpose. To retell my story in the form of memoir would be to overlook the premeditated style of observation and inquiry that I maintained during the entirety of my time in detention. In writing this narrative longform, I chose to employ techniques of immersion journalism and literary journalism as a means of transforming the narrative into a broader reportage piece that is as much about the place, the ‘system,’ and those whom I encountered, as it is about my own experience there.

As a journalist with unprecedented access to an institution and a judicial consequence largely unknown to greater society, I used my personal experience as a narrative framework through which I illustrated

the basic conditions and routines of pretrial detainees within the Rose M. Singer Center. Throughout the narrative, I explored the process of incarceration and extradition, the social climate of the jail, including elements of daily rituals and ‘prison culture,’ and the isolated narratives of those I encountered while detained.

Rationale

Since my experience in the New York City penal system in October of 2016, Rikers has become even more of a salient and incendiary news issue. In the two and a half years following my arrest, coverage of the Rikers Island Correctional Facility has consistently increased nationwide due to political reforms at the federal and municipal levels, along with political plans and public social movements calling to close the island, as well as a string of high-profile court settlements which have highlighted human rights abuses and corruption within the Rikers complex. (More discussion of these topics can be found in the Modern-Day Rikers section of this document.)

Journalistically, Rikers Island presents itself as a relevant and consistently developing news topic. When researching literary work about Rikers Island, I was surprised to discover the existence of only two non-fiction books (Wynn's Inside Rikers (2001) and Buser's Lockdown on Rikers (2015)), other than self-published, tell-all memoir novels written by former correctional officers and reformed inmates. While features have been written about the facility and its surrounding controversies by virtually every major U.S. news title, very little in-depth journalistic work has produced on life within the jail, particularly in the past twenty years. In my research, I came across no journalistic coverage that investigated what it was actually like to end up in jail on Rikers, how easily it could happen, and what it was like to be there, or the procedures surrounding inmate intake and release.

A fundamental reason why a lack of investigative reporting exists on life inside Rikers has long been due to matters of restriction and access, as well as a pervasive lack of transparency from the Department of Correction (Radtke and Mast, 2017). Since beginning this project, I have learned first-hand how ironclad the New York City Department of Correction can be when providing access to members of the media. I realized that my experience inadvertently afforded me a particular advantage. I would never have been able to gain this level of access to the social culture, daily routines, and normative behaviors of inmates on Rikers Island as a journalist (especially as a non-affiliated, freelance journalist,) because I wouldn't have been allowed in the door. Press of any kind is forbidden from

entering any NYC Department of Correction facilities except for inmate meeting rooms, unless a personal exception has pre-approved in writing by the warden of the particular facility (Suen, 2017).

I feel that the scope and intent behind my longform work is well-suited to help fill the void that I've discovered in the media landscape surrounding inmate life on Rikers. In recovering from my experience, I realized that I could either bury this as the result of an unfortunate legal consequence that felt more like a horrible nightmare, or I could tell the story of my experience and everything that I observed and learned. Using my narrative as a vehicle to greater explore Rikers as a fellow protagonist, as well as the downfalls of the NYC Correction system that I experienced first hand felt like the proper approach to coping with the situation that I had endured.

Historical Background

Before there was a jail, there was an island. Originally 35 hectares of isolated farmland, the island that now houses Rikers Island Correctional Facility was sold to Dutch settler Abraham Rycken in 1638, when New York was still 'New Holland,' a Dutch colony. The Rycken family, whose name was eventually anglicized to 'Riker,' maintained ownership over the island until its eventual purchase by the city of New York in 1884. The island was then used as remote grounds for manual prison labor until 1932, when the first 'jail house' opened on the island to accommodate the overpopulated and dilapidated men's prison on Blackwell's (now Roosevelt) Island (Wynn 3, 11-14; Rakia, 2016; "Rikers Public Memory Project").

A massive, federally approved landfill-expansion project was carried out on Rikers Island during the first two decades of the jail's operation. Waste and refuse were shipped to the island from all five boroughs of New York City until the project's completion in 1954 (Lee 9; Steinberg 241-42, Wynn 5). The original 35 hectares of land were more than quadrupled to 168 hectares. The consequences of the expansion have since included grave environmental repercussions and chronic health issues from prolonged exposure (Barth, 2006; Lee 11; Rakia).

The modern-day effects of this expansion have resulted mounting environmental concerns, as the decompression of the islands' landfill base continues to release mass quantities of methane gas. Aside from being the source of the chemical odor for which the island has become notorious, the air quality has been the basis of multiple lawsuits against the DOC on behalf of former Rikers employees with respiratory cancer, who claim the toxic methane is to blame (Rakia).

However, Rikers was not expanded to function just as a network of jails, but as its own self-sustaining colony. The island has maintained its own firehouse, courthouse, hospital, bakery, and tailor shop since the 1970s (Buser iix); Rikers also contains three operating high schools, a nursery, and a full-scale power plant (Barth). The island was accessible only via ferry from the south shore of the Bronx until 1966, and the completion of Francis R. Buono Memorial Bridge. The two-lane, 1,280 meter-long bridge from East Elmhurst, Queens remains the only vehicular entrance to the island to this day (Barth;

Lee 15; Rakia; Wynn 4).

The Rose M. Singer Center for female inmates, named for an original member of the New York City Board of Correction and long-time benefactor to the city's criminal justice program, was opened on Rikers Island in 1988 (*Correction News*, July 1988). Originally built to house 800 inmates, RMSC has since been expanded with modular housing units and at present can accommodate over 1,700 inmates (Menza, 2017). Following the opening of the women's center, the full facility at Rikers Island consisted of ten separate jails, with a capacity to house 16,000 inmates (Lee 19).

Throughout the 1980s and 90s, the population of Rikers Island Correctional Facility increased exponentially. This began, in part, as a direct result of the national effects of the 'Modern War on Drugs,' declared in 1982 by then U.S. President Ronald Reagan (1980-88) (DuVernay, *Thirteenth*). However New York City's jail over-population concerns reached a fever pitch in the early 1990's, following the implementation of a Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's (1994-2001) 'zero-tolerance' policy, which required the immediate incarceration of all those charged with drug-related crimes, while also focusing on relatively minor offenses such as evading subway fares, creating graffiti, and panhandling throughout the city (Kelling and Wilson 1982, 26 -27).

While the national prison rate doubled between 1980-1990, the rate at Rikers more than tripled during the same time (Wynn 9). During 1991, at the height of the city's zero-tolerance drug policy, Rikers held an average daily population of 21,688 inmates (New York City Department Of Correction Criminal Justice Archive). Crowding and over-population became such an issue that in 1987, the City of New York converted two Staten Island ferry boats into 'maritime detention centers,' which were docked on the north shore of the island, housing over three hundred inmates, respectively. When the ferries reached maximum capacity, a converted, 800-bed military barge was purchased and commissioned by the city, opening in 1992 as the Vernon C. Bain Correctional Center, and docked off of the South Bronx opposite Rikers. This floating jail, known among inmates as 'the slave ship,' was the largest floating prison barge in the world at the time. It remained in operation until 2003 (Lee 16; Wynn 19).

Within popular culture, the notoriety surrounding Rikers has resulted from the roster of high-profile inmates who have come through the jails' gates, often figures of national or international renown. This list of infamous public figures includes the famed 'Son of Sam' killer David Berkowitz in 1977; Sex Pistols bassist and singer Sid Vicious, in 1978; Mark David Chapman, who murdered John Lennon in December 1980; in the 90s, rappers Tupac Shakur and Christopher Wallace, also known as the 'Notorious BIG'; in the last decade, Dwayne 'Lil' Wayne' Carter and Earl 'DMX' Simmons, as well as former managing director of the International Monetary Fund, Dominique Strauss Kahn (Althoff, 2018; "Rikers Public Memory Project").

Modern-Day Rikers

“In many ways, [Rikers Island] is like the big white elephant sitting smack in the center of New York City that no one sees. Its invisibility symbolizes the kind of dense national fog that enshrouds the country's thinking when it comes to people who break the law” (Wynn, 2001, p. 10).

A statistical breakdown:

As of January 29th, 2019, 53 percent of inmates within Rikers were Black and 34 percent Latino; 7.5 percent of inmates were Caucasian. Although a combined 87 percent of inmates on Rikers are Black and Latino (New York City Department of Correction At A Glance Report 1), those same racial demographics comprised only 53 percent of New York City's total population, according to the city's most recent census report, released in 2017 (U.S. Census Bureau).

- 90 percent of inmates lacked a high school diploma or GED (Wynn 48).
- 30 percent of inmates were homeless, upon arrest (A Road Map to Closing Rikers: Status Report 4).
- 25 percent have been, or were currently receiving treatment for mental health issues (Buser 33-34).
- 80 percent had a history of substance abuse in some form (Buser 87).
- Almost 95 percent of inmates serving time for drug offenses within New York City jails in 2000 were persons of colour (Wynn 7).
- It costs taxpayers an estimated \$860 million per annum to fund Rikers Island; A cost of \$68,000 per prisoner per annum, compared to the national average of \$25,000 spent per prisoner per annum (Wynn 4).
- 85 percent of inmates on Rikers Island have yet to be convicted of a crime (Goldensohn, 2015).

- Recidivism rates have remained at 75 percent since the early 2000's, meaning, at least statistically, that three out of every four inmates will return to Rikers within a year of their release (Buser iiv; Gonnerman, 2014; Wynn 7).

As of January 2019, Rikers holds an average of 8,136 inmates on any given day (NYC Department of Correction At A Glance Report 1). As a city-run jail, Rikers houses pretrial detainees who are held on bail, or remanded to custody until trial. Of these, 26 percent of detainees were held for misdemeanors charges, and 31 percent were held for nonviolent felonies (Goldensohn, 2015) In 2015, the average time pretrial detainees spent in Rikers and other New York City jails was 176 days (NYC Department of Correction At A Glance Report 3).

Within the past decade, Rikers has been in the news for all the wrong reasons. News of police brutality on the island yielded widespread awareness following *The New York Times'* publication of a 2014 profile of Rikers inmate Robert Hinton, who had been handcuffed, hogtied, and beaten by six correctional officers in a cell block for inmates with mental health issues. Hinton had non-violently resisted a cell transfer, which led to a brutal beating resulting in a broken nose, broken vertebrae and permanent blindness for Hinton in one eye (Schwartz, 2014). While 20 cases of police brutality and misconduct had been tried in administrative DOC courts since 2000, this was the first case of police brutality at Rikers to garner significant enough national attention to result in the termination of the six officers (Winerip and Schwartz, 2014).

Hinton's case brought the attention of the US Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York who, following a year long federal investigation into inmate mistreatment and human rights abuses within Rikers, released a 79-page report in August of 2014 that revealed a “deep-seated culture of violence” between correction officers and adolescent inmates on Rikers Island (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). A month prior to the release of the US Attorney's office report, in July of 2014, *The New York Times* published the documentation of 129 inmates who were severely injured following

altercations with correctional officers at Rikers Island in 2013 alone (Winerip and Schwirtz).

In 2013, homeless veteran Jerome Murdough died from extreme heat exposure in a Rikers cell in another facility's mental health unit that was over 39 degrees Celsius (Mitchell-Aiwuyor, 2015). Murdough's story garnered even more public attention towards police brutality and the inhumane treatment of inmates, particularly those with mental health issues.

In August of 2014, New York's City Council passed legislation for increased oversight of the use of solitary confinement at Rikers Island. The bill called for quarterly reports from all punitive segregation units on the island, documenting the number of inmates in solitary, along with the duration of their stay, and the inclusion of any situations of inmate assaults or injury (Schwartz, 2014).



Standard items issued to an inmate upon arrival. Source: Ashley Gilbertson/VII Photo for New York Magazine, 2015.

It was during this time that the biggest story of inhumane treatment on Rikers was developing. During October of 2014 *The New Yorker* published a profile of Kalief Browder, then 21, who had been held for three years on Rikers Island without a trial. Browder had been 16 when he was arrested in 2010 on

suspicion of stealing a backpack. While awaiting his trial, he spent at least two of his three years at Rikers in solitary confinement (Gonnerman, 2014). Browder was released without ever standing trial or being convicted, once his suspected charge was eventually dropped in May of 2013 (Mitchell, 2015). Upon sharing his story publicly, Browder became a poster child for the downfalls and human rights abuses on Rikers, garnering attention from celebrities like Rosie O'Donnell, as well as New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio (Pearce, 2015).

Despite the attention and awareness Browder's story had raised in the public sphere, the 22 year-old took his own life on June 6, 2015 (Pearce, 2015). In January of the following year, President Barack Obama published an opinion piece in *The Washington Post* criticizing the "overuse" of solitary confinement in American jails, basing his arguments largely on Browder's experience (Obama, 2016). This op-ed introduced and outlined a series of executive orders created by Obama, effectively banning solitary confinement for juvenile offenders in federal prisons (Eilperin, 2016). Despite the national spotlight that Obama's reform brought to inhumane treatment of juvenile detainees, it is worth noting that Obama's reform did not directly affect solitary confinement conditions within Rikers, as it is operated at the state, not federal, level (Nordwall, 2018).

Immediately following the executive orders of President Obama, Mayor Bill de Blasio appointed New York State Chief Judge, Jonathan Lippman, to chair an independent commission, dubbed 'A More Just NYC,' focused on investigating New York City criminal justice and incarceration reform. Following an 18-month independent investigation, Lippman's team published an initial report in April of 2017, calling for a number of sweeping overhauls to the New York City Department of Correction. The most notable and newsworthy recommendation made was the commission's call for "permanently ending the use of Rikers Island as a jail facility in any form or function," which Lippman referred in the report's forward as "a stain on our great city" ("A More Just NYC," 2017). A More Just NYC proposed a 10-year plan to close all ten jail facilities on the island, and outlined extensive plans to relocate current and future inmates to smaller jails throughout each of New York City's boroughs, with the exception of Staten Island (Durkin and Blau, 2017).

Coinciding with the report's 2017 publication, amid intense scrutiny from constituents, fellow city officials, and federal justice-reform organisations like the NAACP and Southern Poverty Law Center, Mayor de Blasio released his own 10-year plan that outlined the closure of Rikers Island (Cook, 2018). The mayor's plan called for increased bail reforms to reduce city prison populations moving forward, as well as "supervised release" programs, and downsizing the number of correctional officers within the city's Department of Correction by nearly two-thirds, from 10,500 to 3,700 correction officers, by 2027 (Gonen, et al., 2017).

However, the State of New York may take action to close Rikers Island even sooner than the city's proposed ten-year timeline. A state-run commission of correction found that, following the city's announcement of their intended closures, violent incidents within the jail complex increased between 2016 and 2017 (Foderaro, 2018). As of 2017, the assault rate at Rikers was the highest it had been in five years (Pinto, 2017). A report conducted by the Nunez Independent Monitor, on behalf of the New York City Department of Correction, found that a persistent "culture of violence" still remains between inmates and staff, with a nine percent increase in the use of force on inmates in 2017 alone (Olivares, 2017).

"Given the city's inaction and protracted 10-year proposal, it is now time for the commission to examine steps to expeditiously close Rikers and to ensure that the constitutional rights of inmates and staff are protected," explained the forward of the 70-page report that was released by the state-appointed Commission of Correction in February of 2018 (Nordwall). At the time of this paper's submission, Rikers Island has nine facilities in operation, with an average daily population of 8,000 inmates (Chammah, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

The research component of this project was divided into two major categories: subject-based research (IE: anything to do with Rikers Island, American jails, mass-incarceration, and relating subject matter), and style-based research (anything to do with narrative approach, genre, and storytelling devices.) With regard to the subject portion of my research, there was no lack of information on the history of Rikers, and an overwhelming volume of news articles and commentary pieces regarding the island's current reputation.

Within the topic of Rikers-specific information, I focused specifically on research and data pertaining to female inmates and the Rose M. Singer Center. After exhaustive research, I discovered very little statistical data actually exists for Rikers' female-only population, and the data that does exist was largely published before 2000. Of the research that I conducted in the past 12 months, the majority of statistical data collected among Rikers inmates has been largely conducted within the island's nine male-only facilities, providing very little relevant data for female inmates and detainees.

Equally as important as the subject-based research that I conducted was my exploration into the genre of narrative non-fiction, or literary journalism, with a deep dive into the history of American immersion journalism, and the integral works therein. I found myself in the unique position of already having experienced my narrative in full, tasked with telling it in retrospect, after the story laid dormant for over a year. In examining the literary devices and narrative techniques of prominent American literary journalists, my intention was to understand how my literary predecessors successfully articulated the enormity of their stories upon completing their experiences, in ways that were not only palatable, but entertaining enough to the story's end.

My intention was the same in examining the craft and practice of immersion journalism. I sought to understand how writers structured their enormous tales of long-term immersion, and how they went beyond the retelling of their experiences, imbuing their stories with social commentary, cultural

takeaways, and greater themes of humanity. I examined a selection of this genre from the greater 20th century (the exception being the work of Nellie Bly from the late 19th century), and examined scholarly research on the impact the immersion journalism had on the written investigative style itself. I also examined critiques of the narrative non-fiction style throughout the 20th century, and published work regarding why literary journalism as a sub-genre of journalism is often marginalized as a legitimate journalistic enterprise.

Methodology

Desktop Research:

The majority of the research discussed above, both subject- and style-based, are constituted within my desktop research. All current events-specific news, all background research on the Rose M. Singer Center, Rikers Island, the New York City Department of Correction, as well as background research on the out-of-state 'fugitive from justice' detainee status, were all investigations conducted remotely.

The entirety of my academic research into the genres of literary journalism, New Journalism, immersion journalism, and all other related inquiries were conducted in South Africa, online and with the help of the University of Witwatersrand library system, through online encyclopedic databases such as LexisNexis, ProQuest, and Taylor and Francis Online.

Field Research and Interviews:

During my time spent in the United States during October-November of 2018, I was able to conduct in-person interviews with a number of different stakeholders within my longform story. First I met with numerous immigration lawyers and legal rights advocates who explained the greater parameters of my situation, and their respective familiarity of the frequency with which it still occurs. I met with two staff members from the Bucks County District Attorney's office in Doylestown, Pennsylvania to discuss the same topics, those of frequency and familiarity of this situation, within my own community, rather than that of greater New York City.

I met with two full-time community-leaders who are leading the #CloseRikers social justice campaign, one a full-time staff member of national advocacy group Just Leadership USA, and one a resident fellow at the Katal Center for Health, Equity and Justice. I was able to participate the Rikers Public Memory Project, a first-of-its-kind oral storytelling project at the Brooklyn Public Library, open to all members of the community affected by Rikers Island.

Continuing in New York, I spent an entire day retracing my trip from JFK to Queens Central Booking, to Rikers, following the route that was driven along the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, between each destination, and stopping at each. Although I made multiple attempts to representatives at US Customs and Border Patrol, Port Authority Police Department, Queens Central Booking, and the New York City Department of Correction, I was not granted access inside any of the facilities where I had been detained. However the trip was instrumental in reacquainting me with the buildings' exteriors, and in dredging-up numerous memories of my experience that had remained dormant until returning to the locations where the story had taken place.

With regards to my interviews conducted, I would have liked to have had the time and resources necessary to engage with a larger interview pool, of both male and female former Rikers inmates, as well as current and former correction staff within Rikers and the city's jail system at large. In the future plans that I have to turn this longform piece into a book-length non-fiction work, a primary focus will be conducting interviews with significantly more individuals who were also formerly detained on Rikers Island.

I was able to obtain the contact information for two of the individuals that I encountered during my time in B block, those referred to in the story as Gloria Espinosa and Tara Dawkins. I followed up on both contact numbers I had found for Gloria, after using an online 'people search' site, although both numbers were dead ends. All court records of pretrial detainees at Rikers Island are sealed, barring a Freedom of Information Act Request, which takes an average of eight months to process. Although I did submit a FOIA request for my own arraignment records, and the police reports for both Tara and Gloria, at the time of this piece's submission, my official request for access has yet to receive a reply from the Queens County Clerk of Courts. Tara was located via social media, with a bit more ease. However, after reaching out to her to begin conversation on three separate platforms, I have yet to receive a response at the time of this piece's submission.

Narrative Therapy:

Narrative therapy is a style of psychotherapy based on the notion that we generate stories in an effort to make sense of our lives and the circumstances in which we find ourselves (Freedman and Combs, ix). While not a frequently cited practice of academic research, this method has been included within my explanation of theoretical framework because it was one of the biggest tools that I used in the process of revisiting and writing about my full experience of incarceration.

Immediately after experiencing detainment and imprisonment, I returned to a place where nobody even knew what Rikers was, and spent a solid year promptly trying to forget it ever transpired in the first place. It wasn't until the start of this project, when I intentionally attempted to tell my story of the experience, in its entirety, rather than a condensed, palatable version, or a few isolated scenes, that I realized just how difficult it was for me to initially revisit a lot of the events described in the corresponding longform piece. What proved even more difficult, upon recalling the finer details of my story, was overcoming the pervasive sense of disassociation that I felt from my own memories from that time. I often found it hard to construct scenes about the experiences I endured, and often forgot that the character I was writing about was actually me, that the events described actually happened to me. In early drafts of this piece, the dissociation was so pervasive, that it often felt as if I was writing the story of someone else entirely.

Utilizing the techniques of narrative therapy, including extensive journaling and stream of consciousness writing, thought-association exercises, mind mapping, and deep-memory meditation exercises, I was able to unpack and reflect on the mental snapshots of the experience that I had been maintaining subconsciously. Through these practices I was able to allow my memory to re-open experiences from my time of detention, that I had either intentionally or inadvertently forgotten. More importantly, I was able to re-inhabit those memories so that the stories I was sharing felt like they actually happened to me, and that the emotions and reactions I was sharing were organic, rather than just the unfortunate tribulations of a third-party character.

Ethical Considerations

I provided pseudonyms for all of the characters in my corresponding longform piece, including fellow inmates, US Customs and Border Patrol officers, Port Authority officers and correctional officers that I spoke with, as well as the legal counsel appointed to my case, to maintain their anonymity outside of my story. All interviews that I conducted were done so under the condition of anonymity, as they were collected on background, for purposes of due diligence and contextualization.

Ethical consideration was given to my frequent use of italics and vernacular within the dialogue of the longform piece. Particular consideration was given to my use of stylized language to reflect the differences in speech between my fellow inmates and myself. When recalling the conversations I had and overheard while in jail, the language patterns of the women around me remain incredibly rhythmic in my memory, almost as if their conversations should be written in overlapping, percussive notation.

The most effective methods I had to convey that rhythmic linguistic style were the use of vernacular to reflect the sound of the words spoken, and the use of italics to reflect the emphasis and rhythm of the sentences as I heard them. Ultimately, my desire to recreate the dialogue as authentically as possible, thus portraying the scenes and story as authentically as possible, outweighed any concerns of maintaining political correctness, with regard to my taking of liberties in recreating the language of women, and a few men, with different racial and socio-classist backgrounds than myself.

Overview of Research

There were four primary sources that remained paramount in my research of both Rikers, and the writing style that I sought to employ. Of these, Inside Rikers: Stories from the World's Largest Penal Colony, was written in 2001 by Jennifer Wynn, current director of the Prison Visiting Project at the Correctional Association of New York. Wynn worked directly with male inmates throughout the island as the director of the criminal re-entry program Fresh Start from 1991-1999, and during that time edited the facility-wide, inmate-written newspaper, *Rikers Review*. The book provided me not only with a thorough history of the island, and a crash course in the prison industrial complex, and retold a score of personal narratives from former inmates that Wynn coached during her decade working on Rikers, allowing me to understand Rikers' pervasive cycle of recidivism through a more micro, narrative-based lens.

The second work, Lockdown on Rikers: Shocking Stories of Abuse and Injustice at New York's Notorious Jail, published in 2015, was penned by psychologist Mary Buser, who worked in the Rose M. Singer Center's Mental Observation Unit from 1995-2000. While this book provided a similarly exhaustive history of the island, and the jail's context in the greater New York criminal justice system, it focused more on the shortcomings of mental health treatment for inmates, highlighting themes of injustice and inhumane treatment through the narratives of her patients. I found no equivalent longform investigations or non-fiction work by members of the media or academia. More surprising was the realization that no longform works have been written about inmate life on Rikers following the early 2000's, before Buser and Wynn both left their positions on the island.

The non-fiction works of Wynn and Buser, both of which have been referenced at length in previous sections of this document, allowed me to adopt a better understanding, not just of the institution and its history, but of the jail's culture, other inmate's personal narratives, and the inherent patterns of recidivism and inmate mistreatment on the island.

The two genre-based primary sources that proved to be invaluable to the formation and stylisation of my longform piece were Nellie Bly's 1887 groundbreaking investigative series, "10 Days in a Madhouse," and Herman Charles Bosman's 1969 prison memoir, Cold Stone Jug.

While the context surrounding each protagonist's detention are remarkably different, Bly's work was what got me through my initial experience, and Bosman's work was what convinced me that I could write about it. Both works transcend being research sources and have helped to embolden me to believe that mine was a story worth telling. Beyond that, the masterful attention by both authors to elements like the conveying language used, description of setting/environment, and the retelling of fellow prisoner's stories, acted as prime examples for me to reference when it came to articulating the same elements within my narrative.

Upon embarking on the genre-research portion of this project, I began by focusing heavily on the creative works and literary legacy of Tom Wolfe, particularly Wolfe's 'The New Journalism: A Manifesto' (1973). From this piece, my analysis was expanded to a number of Wolfe's contemporaries (including Norman Mailer and Hunter S. Thompson), to better understand the New Journalism school of literary journalism, and what distinguished it from both memoir and traditional journalism. Two other key authors whose works proved valuable in my research were Joan Didion and Gay Talese. Both are journalists-cum-novelists who got their starts in feature writing and used the same tools of journalistic inquiry to examine culture. Didion tended to do so broadly, while Talese's work reflects the most micro-levels of society, yet both have mastered the art of true immersion when it comes to telling the stories of others. While I had read work from both authors before beginning this research, it wasn't until I encountered extensive analysis of the literary techniques and legacies of both writers that I began to reexamine their exhaustive collections with the intention of identifying and emulating their methods of transfusing memoir, observation and commentary regarding broader socio-cultural trends.

One downfall that I encountered during this portion of my research was focusing too strongly on the

volume of academic work produced regarding the vague redundancy among the genres of narrative non-fiction, literary journalism, new journalism, and literary reportage. There appeared to be just as much academic work published about the classifications of, and distinctions between, each genre, as there was about their respective principles and characteristics. I found that, while compelling and worthy of inquiry, discerning these micro-differences between genres did nothing to further my particular research or project goals.

My investigation of literary journalism as a cultural form was shaped greatly by the academic works of media scholars Paul Thomas Meyers and Thomas Connery. Their works provided useful jumping-off points for the continuation of my research within this genre. Regarding my specific investigation of immersion journalism, the first academic source that provided the basis for my inquiry was Dr. Megan Le Masurier's "What is Slow Journalism?" (2014), which provided a comprehensive overview of the genre and allowed me to pursue further texts referenced within the dissertation.

The primary sources that I used as key examples of immersion journalism included Nellie Bly's "10 Days in A Madhouse," primarily, the immersive works of Ted Conover, particularly Guarding Sing Sing (2000), Lillian Ross' famed *New Yorker* profile of Ernest Hemingway, "How Do You Like It Now, Gentlemen?" (1950), and Gay Talese's seminal collection of feature essays, Frank Sinatra Has A Cold and Other Essays (2015). The academic analysis of these seminal texts, found in the work of Le Masurier, and Susan Greenberg's writings on the genre, allowed me to review the primary sources in conjunction with the academic analyses that I had, which afforded me a greater understanding of the genre-specific devices used and how to emulate the style of writing as a whole.

Literature Review

1. What are the favored narrative devices of New Journalism?

In my research of the genre of narrative non-fiction, my focus was initially concentrated to the school of New Journalism. This was an intentional choice, as academic writings on narrative non-fiction, literary journalism, and all other synonymous titles for the genre can prove to be exhaustive from the outset. By beginning my research with New Journalism, I very quickly learned of four literary devices that qualified non-fiction feature writing as 'New Journalism.' These four devices were first defined as characteristic of the genre when described at length by Tom Wolfe in his seminal essay, "Introduction: The New Journalism," in which Wolfe cemented his reputation as one of the prominent leaders of the New Journalism movement. What some consider to be a "manifesto" written on behalf of New Journalism itself (Pauly 1), was the first of its kind to be published regarding what exactly New Journalism was. In this piece, Wolfe posits that all pieces of New Journalism must include by scene construction, recreation of realistic dialogue, the use of characterization through point of view, and the inclusion of details symbolic to the "status life" of the characters being described (Wolfe 1973, 31-32).

In addition to analyzing Wolfe's four tenets of New Journalism in his dissertation, 'The New Journalist as Culture Critic' (1983), media scholar Paul Thomas Meyers goes on to review and cite a number of additional literary devices that Wolfe incorporated into his own writing including the following: inverted chronology, the imitation of dialect or other idiosyncratic speech patterns, deviation from normal punctuation, and incorporating stream of consciousness in narration (29).

While Wolfe's "Introduction..." was a practical jumping off point in the study of narrative devices in non-fiction, I was aware that the scope of the piece was limited to Wolfe's own expertise, and to those of his immediate contemporaries. In an effort to understand the technical characteristics of the genre, I researched the stylistic choices and literary devices used by one of Wolfe's more distant contemporaries, journalist, screenwriter and novelist, Joan Didion. In her 2002 dissertation, "Women Who Transformed Journalism...", media scholar Anne Entriakin Thorne examines the works of three

female journalism pioneers who contributed to the canon of literary reportage in the early 20th century.

The dissertation analyzes Wolfe's Introduction to New Journalism, but goes further to contextualize the literary movement beyond Wolfe's limited historical explanation, which primarily focuses on the contributions of the New York newspaper feature writing scene of the 1960's. While Wolfe's explanation credits the main developments of New Journalism to a tight-knit 'boys club,' Thorne approaches the literary phenomenon from the works of three females whose contributions, while substantial, often go overlooked in a canon with the likes of Truman Capote, Norman Mailer and Wolfe himself (6).

The section that I benefited from the most was Thorne's analysis of Didion's short-form reportage writing. The author presented an exhaustive analysis of the devices Didion frequently utilized by within that work, such as lexical parallelism, syntactical deviance, and the creation of narrative tension through the simple juxtaposition of past and present (165).

It is through Didion's deviance from traditional reportage methods of the mid-20th century, particularly surrounding story structure, that afforded Didion such renown during an era that was drastically defined by the literary efforts of her male contemporaries. Thorne asserts that Didion's writing "demands an emotional and psychologically involvement from the reader, yielding a multi-layered response. She structures the stories in such a way that the structure itself reveals part of the story" (31).

Particularly relevant to my story was Thorne's analysis of Didion's "persistent theme of dislocation" in her non-fiction writing. "No one is where they are supposed to be" (168). While this modernist approach does not explicitly state that characters within Didion's stories are "dislocated," the obviousness of their dislocation forms another layer of narrative tension for the reader. Since my longform narrative is inherently a story of my own dislocation, I was able to re-read Didion's canon of short-form reportage to analyze the subtlety with which such dislocation was made known to readers, without being explicitly stated.

Didion's contributions to the 1960's school of New Journalism has been characterized by her inherent ability to weave her own personal narrative into the subject-based pieces she wrote, using irony and parallelism to frame her singular experience into the stories of current events or broader contemporary culture. In The White Album, Didion pontificates on American culture during the late 1960s through the lens of her own psychological trajectory of the time, providing her own deteriorating mental state as an apropos frame story for the unhealthy cultural climate of which she writes (Muggli 147).

Separate from the two texts mentioned, I found the transcripts of the Nieman Foundation's Narrative Journalism Conferences to be particularly informative, with regard to the first-hand literary advice provided by many of the writers whom I had been studying in my research. I found the most value in a published transcript of a panel from the 2nd Annual Nieman Narrative Journalism Conference, in which moderator Bob Giles speaks with eight lauded narrative journalists about what it takes to "produce fine narrative writing" (2002, 4).

The most well-known writers of the group, namely Gay Talese and Isabel Wilkerson, delivered very compact answers that outlined particular ethical standards and practices that, in their opinions, are never to be deviated from. For example, Gay Talese pointedly reminded narrative journalists that any deviation from the facts at hand, or the inclusion of known inaccuracies in favor of a more interesting story, was against the very purpose of truth-telling that all journalism seeks to fulfill. "No composite characters, no changing names," Talese advised (9).

The Poynter Institute's Chip Scanlan credited a big part of the effectiveness of narrative journalism to another research topic of mine, immersion journalism. "What it takes is immersion reporting. It's just being there, immersing yourself so that the writer inhabits the story, and, by taking up residence in the story, it seems to affect everything... Whether the attribution is clear or not, there is this sense that the writer is inside that story by dint of spending an enormous amount of time" (8).

However the most poignant piece of advice that I took from the panel discussion was that of Pulitzer

Prize Winner Tom French, about the power of 'tiny moments:'

“You really need to have faith in the power and importance of tiny, tiny moments ... The longer I do this, the more I learn to have faith that in those times when it looks like nothing is happening in front of me, except something very important is happening. I just need to learn to pay attention better” (7).

Not only does French’s advice speak to the perceptibility and curiosity of the journalist, but it also stands on its own as a tenant of immersion journalism.

2. How is literary journalism a cultural form?

What does literary journalism contribute to society, and how do those contributions differ from those of novelists and journalists? Essentially, why does literary journalism call for a genre of its own? A lot of writing has been done regarding the cultural contributions of one particular subset of literary journalism—the previously discussed school of New Journalism. One of the reasons it has garnered so much academic attention is precisely because of the huge cultural attention the genre received from the American public sphere during the mid to late-20th century.

In Paul Thomas Meyers’ previously-cited dissertation, the author explores the sense of transparency and personalization that New Journalism provided by incorporating the writer’s point of view, a marked deviation from the traditionally impartial third-party tone of print journalism content. By incorporating ‘self’ into their journalism, the noted writers of the New Journalism era were able to reveal their own perspectives and biases (either explicitly or implicitly), and comment upon their own techniques (10). “The New Journalist obtains much of his authority because his perspective is not disguised” (38).

However, aside from specific literary devices that distinguish the genre, Meyers considers the crucial tenet of New Journalism to be the ability to tell a factual and societally-relevant news story with the literary style and narrative attention of fiction writing. When discussing the early contributions of Truman Capote and Norman Mailer—who considered themselves novelists instead of journalists--Meyers concluded, “What they both seemed to be saying was that factual material could be presented to the reader in a form conspicuous for its techniques derived from the craft of fiction writing” (29).

Meyers goes on to suggest a “subjective reality” that was not only inherent to the events themselves, but in the writer's relationship to those events, which writers like Mailer and Capote argued were as important as the “empirically verifiable facts” (30).

What I feel is the most apt example of New Journalism’s role as a cultural form was the ability for the writing to bring context and humanity to complex, intangible socio-cultural issues by examining them from the most specific micro-level narrative examples. In doing so, and in sharing their own experiences, New Journalists interpreted those broad issues for readers in a human-based, digestible narrative. While published in 1983, and written about the literary trends of the 1960's, Meyers perfectly articulated how New Journalism sought to rectify issues that are still plaguing today's public sphere: namely those of news apathy and a desire for greater transparency within the news media.

Citing John Hellman's *Fables of Fact: New Journalism as New Fiction* (1981), Meyers explains, “We live in a society where actual people and events are daily experienced as images in the mass media” (Hellman 68 qtd. in Meyers 29). The role of the New Journalist “directly confronts these actualities” through their immersive work, interpreting these events for the reader, thus, as Hellman says, “fulfilling the function of explorers who pass through the frontiers of ordinary experience and then return to tell us what is on the other side” (Hellman x-xi qtd. in Meyers 39). Meyers expounds on Hellman's initial argument, with the following explanation, that I feel compelled to include in full:

One of the reasons for the success of the New Journalism has been precisely that it reveals the meaning of topical events—which often seem as bizarre as fantasy—in a manner that not only helps readers gain a greater knowledge and perspective of the world around them but also a feeling of a relationship to the particulars of that world ... The personality of the New Journalist in the role of witness/observer or participant provides his audience with a source of coherence, and sense of the human scale of events ... If the New Journalist writes well, the reader is able to share the joys and difficulties which attend the search for clarity and enlightenment (40).

I was hard pressed to find scholarly articles that explored the broader genre of 'literary journalism,' as opposed to the plethora of writing that I found on the cultural contributions of New Journalism, specifically. In his research review, 'Magazines and Literary Journalism: An Embarrassment of Riches' (1994), media scholar Thomas B. Connery explores the role that literary journalism plays in capturing

cultural expression, or “life being lived at a specific moment in a specific place” (4).

Connery begins his review by unpacking the significance of the term 'literary journalism,' itself. “Literary” is used because it says that while the work considered is journalistic. . . its purpose is not just informational.” Connery argues that, in contrast, a journalistic work is structured to convey “pure” information, basic facts, and expert opinions in an efficient and concise manner. Through the addition of the term 'literary' to 'journalism,' it's clear to the reader that “style becomes part of the meaning conveyed; the structure and organization of language interpret and inform” (15).

The author cites the theory of rationalism and romanticism in literary journalism by media scholar Joseph M. Webb, and goes into depth describing what Webb described as the notion of the 'Romantic Reporter,' or, “a journalist who rejects the rationalism and scientific realism that underlie modern journalism's belief in objectivity.” It was Webb's belief that the developments within literary journalism would continue to divert from the realism of hard news and embrace the newfound narrative power that comes with an abandonment of objectivity (Webb 60 qtd. in Connery 5).

In the author's efforts to analyze literary non-fiction as a cultural form of expression, or what media scholar David Eason goes so far as to call a 'cultural construct,' (1984, 53-55), Connery asserts that literary journalism interprets and reaffirms the common values shared by the society it is writing for, but it also changes those values and “versions of reality” by its very nature of subjectivity and interpretation (5). Connery then references renowned journalism scholar, Michael Schudson's language regarding journalism, arguing that “literary journalism demonstrates another way that the stories we tell ourselves and circulate among ourselves serve as reminders of who we are and what we're about” (Schudson 427 qtd. in Connery 6).

Schudson's line is eerily similar to the opening line of Didion's famous essay collection, The White Album, and the title of her collected works of non-fiction, “We tell ourselves stories in order to live.” Our constructions of reality become our realities. Through Connery's analysis of how literary

journalism is in itself, a “‘meaningful form’ that contributes to our cultural meaning-making” (6), I am reminded of the responsibility literary journalists carry in *getting it right*, both in conveying the stories of their subjects, but also in the inclusion of their personal experience and commentary. By Connery's assessment, if a journalist's work is anything less than completely truthful, the very framework through which culture makes sense of the world will lack the integrity needed to afford a functioning public discourse within a social culture at large (8).

3. What are the benefits of immersion journalism in longform storytelling?

When I began researching the area of immersion journalism, it became clear that it was a method of storytelling that has been utilized by journalists and writers for centuries. One of the most formative examples of longform immersion journalism, which I first learned of during an undergraduate Journalism History course, was Nellie Bly's groundbreaking exposé “10 Days in a Mad-House” (1887), which was first published as an investigative feature series for *New York World*. Before I analyze Bly's work further, I will first discuss the values of immersion journalism that distinguish it from the rest of journalism.

For many today, the act of undertaking long-term immersion journalism assignments, in our current age of 24-hour media cycles and instantaneous global news updates, can be viewed as a rebellious but ultimately futile endeavor. However, in Dr. Megan Le Masurier's 2015 research article and subsequent book, “What is 'Slow Journalism?’” the author argues that the deliberate decision to craft longform feature pieces, which require longer periods of investigation, and yield less bylines from the journalist during the process, can yield great advantages. Le Masurier cites journalist Susan Greenberg in *Prospect* magazine article from 2007, in which Greenberg argues that longform non-fiction has the potential to “end the dominance of our 'fast' news culture ... We get basic news cheaply, on air and online ... There should be a growing market for essays, reportage and other non-fiction writing that takes its time to find things out, notice stories that others miss, and communicates it all to the highest standards: 'slow journalism' “ (Greenberg 2007, 382 qtd. in Le Masurier 142). The author also takes great care to outline the historical contributions to immersion journalism, citing Bly's late 19th century

work, and tracing her influences through the greater 20th century. From this perspective, slow journalism does not seem like a new phenomenon. However, Le Masurier asserts that “slow journalism is being used to refer much more than temporality in production” (141).

The author once again cites Greenberg in highlighting one of the fundamental principles of slow journalism: that of transparency. “More productive is Greenberg’s recent argument that slow journalism would show the reader the ‘provenance’ of information and ‘how it was gathered’ and ‘to acknowledge the subjectivity and uncertainty that exists in factual discovery’ within the journalism itself” (Greenberg 2013, 386 qtd. in Le Masurier, 144). While never explicitly stated, this is an argument for transparency that calls for slow journalism to “lay bare the way stories are reported, by, for example, crediting all sources, being clear about what is original journalism and what is reproduced PR copy, and being clear about how information is obtained...” (Le Masurier 142).

Apart from Le Masurier's text, the other two sources that provided the most information on this subject were primary sources. The first was another transcribed presentation from the 2nd Annual Nieman Narrative Journalism Conference by Gay Talese. “Writing About Ordinary Lives” (2002), highlights the responsibility of writers to convey the intricacies of private life in public print. Talese explains that while writers have long-since dealt with capturing private life, the world of journalism deals with issues and public characters who are already known to us. The way that Talese manages to fuse these two diverging concepts is through his coverage of ordinary, unremarkable subjects. “The private life that I wanted to delve into was the life of a person who would not be worthy of news coverage ... I wanted to move the realm of curiosity into the lives of people who had been ignored, because I thought ... their lives had something to represent in terms of higher reality” (11).

Talese urges to remain as true to the facts as possible, never overlooking or ignoring facts in pursuit of a better story. “No taking liberties with factual information, but getting to know your characters through research and building trust, building relationships ... Your sources become so known to you and you have this trusting relationship which you do not take advantage of” (12). It is through this

fundamental rule that I am reminded of the prohibitive circumstances of my own narrative experience, and how, if I had been in the position to plan a premeditated immersion, I would have been able to provide more factual information, document verbatim dialogue and review even finer details of the immersion that have since been lost to memory.

Coupled with Talese's espoused insights on the craft is the aforementioned "10 Days in the Mad House" (1887) by American reporter and 'muckraker,' Nellie Bly. After intentionally feigning mental instability and being remanded to the care of the city, Bly spent ten days institutionalized in a well-known, public insane asylum on New York City's Blackwell's Island to document first-hand the facility's condition and the treatment of patients in city-run mental wards. Bly chronicles her entire journey day-by-day, starting with how she managed to get admitted to the asylum, to the layout of the facility, the daily routines and the treatment of mental wards by hospital staff and psychiatric doctors, along with detailed characterizations of the women she encountered and their various mental afflictions.

The egregious patient mistreatment and traumatizing behavior that Bly experienced and observed during her ten days undercover motivated her to testify before a grand jury about the accusations she had made against the municipal facility in her series.

"I answered the summons with pleasure, because I longed to help those of God's most unfortunate children whom I had left prisoners behind me. If I could not bring them liberty, I hoped at least to influence others to make life more bearable for them" (50). I identify deeply with Bly's urge to share the stories of the everyday injustices she observed Blackwell's Island. This is the only narrative example I have found that articulates the true empathy and dismay that I felt for many of the women I met at Rikers. Bly's story also highlights the "victim of circumstance" concept, which was a major takeaway from my own experience.

Bly's work came to my mind during my own incarceration, inspiring to treat my situation like hers, as if I had cavalierly opted to go undercover to explore the practices and condition of New York City's

most notorious jail. In rereading Bly's famed collection, I am reminded of the volume of work, the sheer amount of words it takes to record ten days worth of completely appalling and foreign treatment, particularly after the fact. If the memory of Bly's work provided me with a sense of purpose during my experience, re-examining "10 Days in A Mad House" during my research phase gave me a blueprint for how to actually sit down and write about a lived experience of that magnitude, particularly for an audience unfamiliar with the institution and faction of society of which I write.

4. How is prison explained by other involuntarily immersed writers?

With regards to prison memoir, I was challenged to find works that resonated with my role as an outsider, and most of the memoirs I came across were in the form of tell-all books penned by reformed inmates or former correction officers. There are two exceptions to this that I came across; the first is a full-length tale of immersion journalism that lasted for over two years—Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing (2002) is an account of Conover's time spent working undercover as a correctional officer in the notorious New York State prison facility. The second example that I came across was another full-length memoir, Cold Stone Jug (1969), penned by South African poet/writer/journalist, Herman Charles Bosman.

For purposes of this literature review, I am only analyzing Bosman's work as it is more directly relevant to my longform narrative, although Conover's contributions to the field of immersion journalism and my own research remain essential.

Bosman's Cold Stone Jug was the first piece of prison literature I read upon deciding to tell this story in the form of a longform narrative thesis. This novella-style memoir tells the story of how a then 19 year-old Bosman went from a death sentence charge to a transmuted sentence of five years' hard labour, within Pretoria Central Prison from 1927-1932. Since Bosman only published this work 37 years after his release, I was inspired by the vividness of the memories that he documented, with a level of detail and attention that would suggest they happened yesterday. This emboldened me early on to convey my own memories with the masterful level of recall that Bosman employs.

There is a particular element to Bosman's tone, that of a cheeky and irreverent narrator, which at times is discordant with the very premise of his story, in which Bosman accidentally killed his step-brother with a shotgun following a contretemps on Christmas Eve in 1926. "To be locked up in a prison and to be misunderstood by those about you has got to it certain very bitter features. Especially if you are young and you have gaiety in your nature" (46).

As a reader, I had to remind myself how his circumstances contributed to the newfound gratitude he expressed for such simple things, like the gift of being alive. "I had a terrific urge for life. It was an urge that burnt me up like a lump of wood gets burnt up in a kitchen coal stove. Life! You got no idea what a wild, fanatical zest I had for the mere thing called living. And this thing knocked hell out of me" (125).

By including such declarations of joy, Bosman skillfully juxtaposed that joy with the more frequently mentioned moments of poignant heartbreak, thus rendering even stronger empathy from the reader. When describing how long-time inmates would speak, Bosman wrote, "...And a story would flow from him like blood from a wound. They were no longer human beings. They were no longer people, or living creatures in the ordinary sense of the word. They were merely battered receptacles of stories; tarnished and rusted containers out of which strange tales issued, like *djinns* out of magic bottles" (45-46).

In the text, Bosman deviates from a chronological timeline, retelling stand-alone stories with no indication of the elapsed time between the events described. This appealed to me as an intentional device used to show how prisoners lack the privilege of keeping time, and as such, it often becomes irrelevant. I also appreciated how Bosman characterizes the very building of the prison complex, as if it were its own character in the story, writing, "The prison itself was a live thing, sweating and suffocating in its own immurement" (204).

There were a number of universal aspects of prison life in the text that evoke strong memories of my own experience. Particularly when Bosman writes of the verbal mistreatment of inmates by their wardens, I was reminded of the behavior of the Correction Officers at Rikers Island. Bosman described, “Meaningless remarks, addressed at nobody in particular, but that sounded very ferocious until you got used to them... I should say that it would take, on an average, about three years to get used to that form of procedure on the part of the warders – addressing blood-curdling threats and stern injunctions at nobody in particular” (64).

Bosman also aptly describes the shame of being a prisoner, writing, “I would walk beside my new acquaintance, my shoulders drooping and my self-esteem in the dust ... I was a member of some sub-pariah species. I was in prison, and, on top of everything else, guilty” (98-99). This self-aware sense of shame evoked strong memories of my own guilt, and my wondering if the crime that I had committed warranted the consequences I was forced to face.

The only piece of Bosman's commentary on prison life that concerned me, rather than emboldened me to write my own story of incarceration was the author's following assertion: that attempting to articulate the true misery of prison to an unfamiliar audience is a foolish and unachievable task. Bosman writes,

“If I have succeeded in conveying nothing of the misery of prison existence, the soul-killing monotony, the bleak gloom and brutality, then I am very glad. Because these are things that nobody should pen. For one thing, you can't. You only make a fool of yourself if you try” (77).

While Bosman's prison memoir was invaluable in shaping my own narrative, this one sentiment will not deter me from my pursuit of articulating that very mundanity, monotony and gloom of which Bosman writes.

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Appendices

Appendix A—Glossary of Terms

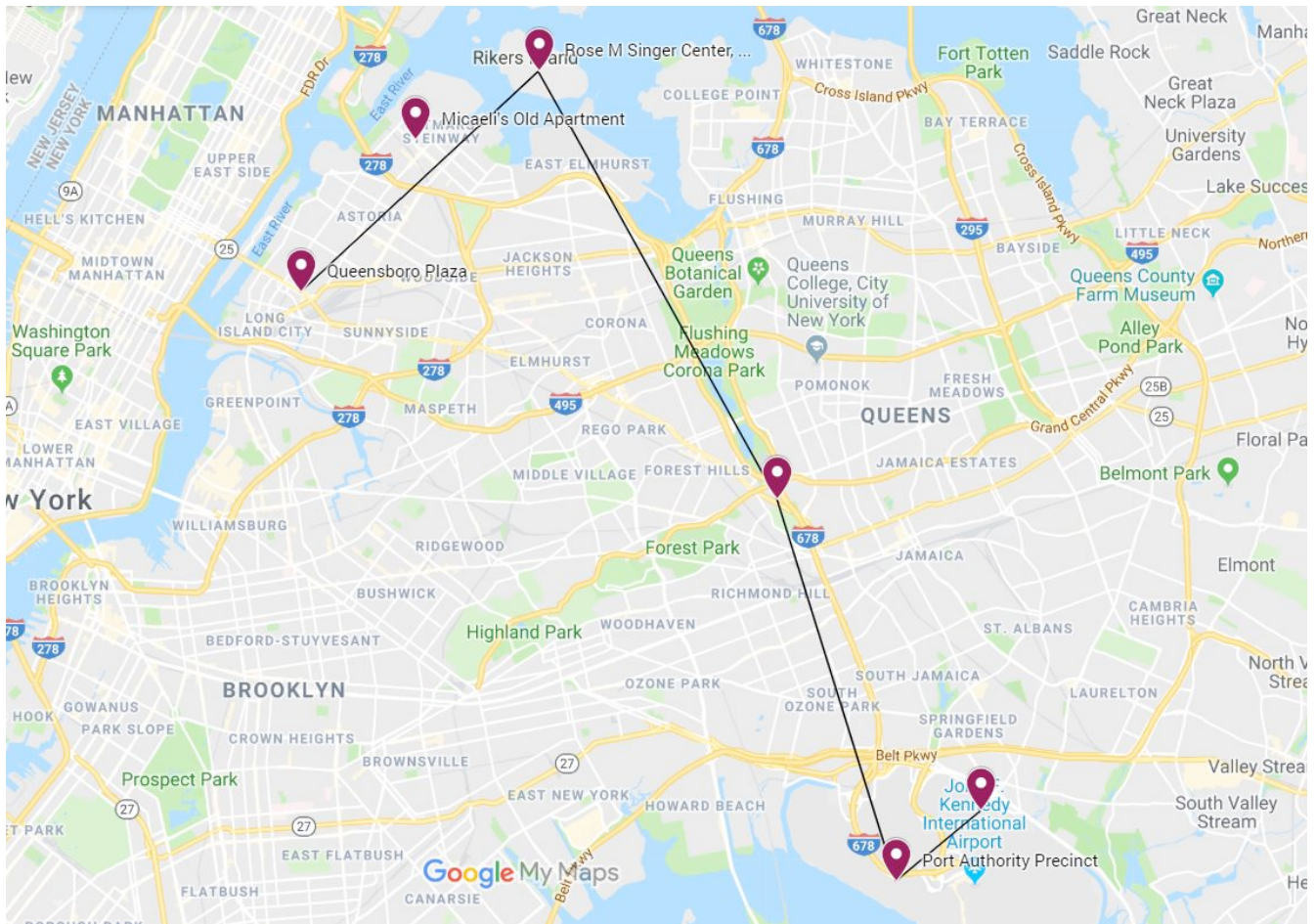
Appendix B—Map of Queens with key locations

Appendix C— Map of Rikers complex

Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

- Arraignment- A criminal proceeding at which the defendant is officially called before a court of competent jurisdiction, informed of the offense, charged in the complaint, and asked to enter a plea of guilty, not guilty, or as otherwise permitted by law. In many states, bail is set during the arraignment process (West's Encyclopedia of American Law, 2008).
- Bench warrant- An arrest warrant issued by a judge for a number of infractions including failing to appear for court appearances or trials.
- Bo-bo's- A slang term for prison-issued shoes.
- CO- Correctional Officer
- DOC- Referring to the NYC Department of Correction
- “Fish”- A new inmate, one unschooled in prison etiquette
- “Fugitive from justice”- “An individual who, after having committed a criminal offense, leaves the jurisdiction of the court where such crime has taken place or hides within such jurisdiction to escape prosecution (West's Encyclopedia of American Law).
- “Head”- A slang term for an individual addicted to heavy opiate drugs, commonly heroin.
- MO-Mental Observation Unit
- Remanded- The act of being detained, without being formally sentenced. Often, those remanded are done so without the option of bail, or because they are unable to pay the set bail price determined by the judge during their arraignment.
- RMSC- Rose M. Singer Center, the female detention center at Rikers Island. Commonly referred to among inmates and staff members as “Rosie.”
- The Rock- A slang term used by inmates to refer to Rikers Island
- “Tuchie”- Synthetic marijuana, also referred to commonly as “K2” or “Spice,” its use has become increasingly prevalent among jail and prison populations because it can’t be detected in urine samples (prison-diaries.com).

Appendix B: Map of Queens with key locations



Appendix C: Map of Rikers Island Correctional Facility

